

SACRIFICE, AHIMSA, AND VEGETARIANISM: POGROM AT  
THE DEEP END OF NON-VIOLENCE

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# SACRIFICE, AHIMSA, AND VEGETARIANISM: POGROM AT THE DEEP END OF NON-VIOLENCE

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This dissertation explores the relation of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and vegetarianism to sacrificial logic in post-independence Ahmedabad. It follows the transformation of ahimsa--from a protection of the sacrificer against the revenge of the animal victim; to a doctrine of renunciation, self-reform, and prohibition of animal sacrifice; to Gandhi's famous tool for nonviolent resistance to colonial domination; and finally, to the ritualization of violence itself in the organized persecution of minorities in a secular state.

Central Gujarat is often called the "laboratory of Hindutva." Hindutva offers an interpretation of "Hinduism" as a historical subject threatened by Islam and Christianity. It portrays Hindus as victims of Muslim barbarism, slaughtered and humiliated, butchered and raped, and demands a response that redefines the relation of violence to ahimsa. Its electoral success can be traced to a claim to unify Adivasi, lower, and intermediary caste groups with the Savarnas (high castes) as "Hindus" in opposition to Muslims and Christians, who are positioned as foreigners.

As ethno-religious identifications have become integral to representation in a secular democratic system, traditional practices relating to diet and worship are simultaneously reconfigured. This research investigates the embodiment and experience of disgust among members of upwardly mobile castes, who are encouraged both to externalize their own low caste practices and to distance themselves from Muslims and Christians in new ways.

In the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Ahmedabad, an event around which this dissertation turns, I witnessed a mimetic reversal of Hindutva's claim. Violence returns as legitimate punishment of Muslims. The contemporary conjuncture of sacrificial language, beef prohibition, and vegetarianism makes explicit a subliminal criminalization of the dietary practices of minorities positioned permanently outside Hindutva identity. Most criminalized among these groups is the unabashed meat-consuming Muslim. The excessive expenditure of phantasmatic projections onto the Muslim is expressed in a *mélange* of culinary and sacrificial idioms. The putatively excessive sexuality, violence, and power of the Muslim are themselves transformations of the symbolics of food and ingestion. The pogrom and reactions to it reveal how a notion of nonviolence becomes implicated in violence that has a sacrificial character.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi was born in West-Berlin, in a divided Germany, and spent early childhood in Montreal, Paris, and Berlin. In 1986 he graduated from Priest River Lamanna High-School in Idaho as a foreign exchange student, and in 1988 completed his Abitur at Schiller-Gymnasium in Berlin. In 1998 he obtained a Magister in Ethnologie, Soziologie and Religionswissenschaften from the Freie Universität Berlin. He received an M.A. in socio-cultural anthropology from Cornell in 2000, and a Ph.D. in January 2006. He conducted language study and fieldwork in Gujarat in 1995/96, 1999, 2000, 2001-2003, and 2005.

*“The Brahminy bull looks every inch a Hindu; and the goat, to accustomed eyes, has no less decided a Muhammadan air.”*

John Lockwood Kipling, 1892

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## 0.0 Introduction

### 0.1 Questions

Central Gujarat is often called the “laboratory of Hindutva.” During fieldwork, in February 2002, I witnessed the effects of this laboratory: an anti-Muslim pogrom in the city of Ahmedabad. This dissertation documents and analyzes the pogrom as event, its causes, precedents, and consequences. It focuses on the central paradox of how *ahimsa* (nonviolence), understood today as a doctrine of nonviolence and closely associated with practices of vegetarianism, became implicated in the production of the very violence it renounces. More specifically, it explores how the cyclical violence of pogroms are the expression of a sacrificial logic in which *ahimsa* is subject to historical transformation and whereby the relation between sacrificer, sacrificer, and victim is rearticulated.

In addition to documenting the pogrom and the ritualization of violence in Ahmedabad, this dissertation bases its analysis on ethnographic encounters that investigate the embodiment and experience of disgust among members of upwardly mobile castes and classes, who are encouraged both to externalize their own low caste practices (such as meat-eating) and to distance themselves from the Muslim and the Christian in an entirely new way. Peter Van der Veer (1996) has argued that contemporary cultural practices have to be understood as both expression of new developments after the formation and consolidation of the Indian nation state as well as continuous with pre-colonial and colonial times. If culture is the stuff that makes the nation, then its material has to have an effect on the present.

Unlike other parts of India, in Gujarat the consolidation of high caste political dominance has made *ahimsa*, cow-protection, and vegetarianism difficult to distinguish conceptually. The influential merchant communities of Jains and Hindu Vaishnavas, as well as dominant groups like the Patel, are considered vegetarians on

the face of it, as are all other dominant Hindu sects and movements largely financed by them, such as the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*. The latter Hindu sect--known for its strict vegetarian ethos--is intimately associated with the upwardly mobile Patel groups who rose fairly recently to prominence in the economy and in matters of social prestige. Cultivators in the nineteenth century, the Patel (also called Patidar or Kanbi) were considered of *shudra* status, but already in 1955 David F. Pocock stressed that the group successfully competed with Brahmins and Vaniya in matters of ritual status (1955:71).<sup>1</sup>

The Patel are an interesting historical model of caste upward mobility and change. In Gujarati society of the nineteenth century, Alexander Forbes mentioned the important distinction between “Brahmin-wâneeâ” on the one hand, and the Rajput on the other (Forbes Vol. II, 1878:236). The former were synonymous with “oojulee-wustee” (literally, a high population), an old version of the contemporary *ujliyat loko*, used in urban Ahmedabad to denote upper caste and class groups inclusive of Patel today. In other words, the Patel are today referred by a term that used to be reserved for Brahmins and Vaniyas, the latter consisting mostly of Jains and Hindu Vaishnava.

Not mentioned as a specific group before the British census reports, the Kanbi (peasant) became a “favoured caste” to the colonial authorities in comparison to the warring Koli and Rajput groups (Pocock 1955:71). Enthoven even claimed that, “a Koli settling down to agricultural pursuits in the Deccan frequently becomes a Kanbi” (Vol II, 1922:243pp.). Accordingly, Kanbi could claim Vaishya, as well as Kshatriya origin respectively (Enthoven Vol II, 1922:134pp). Pocock (1972:56) has confirmed this ambiguity ethnographically also more recently. The Kanbi were cultivators divided into three branches, the Leva, Kuruva, and Anjuna (Forbes, Vol. II,

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<sup>1</sup>There exists significant consciousness about this fact. Members of groups considering themselves more noble as the *nouveau riche*, such as Vaniya and Brahmins, for example, will sometimes refer to the Patel pejoratively as merely “*shudra*,” despite their own claims to high status. Usually this is done in their absence. Pocock recorded similar experiences (1960:141).



1878:237); Shah counts five branches: Leva, Kadva, Anjana, Bhakta, and Matia (1982:7). In the catastrophic period of famine and plague at the turn to the twentieth century, large sections of Kanbi immigrated to East Africa, which turned out to be economically very advantageous (Note that caste rules did not permit travel for members of upper castes at that time).<sup>2</sup>

During Moghul rule, a few sections of Kanbi families carried the title *patidar*, indicating a specific land tax instituted by the rulers (Pocock 1955:71). In 1931, the year of the last caste census in India, the Kanbi insisted to change their name to the more prestigious name Patidar, using the former title to denote the entire group inclusive of all branches. During my field research in Ahmedabad and Baroda, the term Patel was much more commonly used than Patidar. Pocock (1972, 1973), has produced two excellent studies on the modern Patidar stressing the fact of change and the role of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*, one of the most powerful and influential Hindu “sects” that advocate strict vegetarianism, ahimsa, and agitate against animal sacrifice (cf. Mallison 1974).

The Swaminarayan tradition, founded in the early nineteenth century, is often claimed to be the last of the great Vaishnavite sects. But as many authors have pointed out, its tenets and philosophy departed in significant ways from the preceding epicurean style of the Vallabhacharya, another important Gujarati Vaishnavite tradition. The austere ethos of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*, its strict separation of the sexes and dietary prescription, is inclusive of a strong inclination toward active social service (*seva*) and reform. This has prompted some scholars to understand the

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<sup>2</sup>Shah claims the Patidar had a heightened political ambition already in the eighteenth century, in the context of increasing economic prosperity due to the “Commercial Revolution” of the time (1964:93pp.). In consequence, he claims, the Patidar (note not *all* Kanbi) were a “wealthy caste” by the end of Moghul rule (94). Yagnik (2002), in contrast, places more stress on the effects of the Great Famine of 1900. In its wake, he claims, peasant communities started to diversify into modern sectors such as commerce, industry, and technical education and to migrate abroad in a first wave. The cumulative effects of these transformations were heightened urbanization within Gujarat as well as an international Gujarati diaspora.

sect in the context of neo-Hindu movements of the nineteenth century (Mallison 1974).

The sect seems to have played an important role in allowing upwardly mobile groups to assimilate high caste practices without any serious challenge to established order. It has more or less successfully allowed the Patel to formulate claims to higher ritual status against competing groups, while being less inviting to Adivasi or Dalits (Hardiman 1988:1908). The sect's strategies have changed, however, and since the 1990's the sect has paid particular attention to the tribal areas of Panchmahal (William 2001:109,171). In the tradition of Vaishnavite missions, Sahajanand Swami opposed especially the sacrificial complex of the Mother Goddess; the violence of animal sacrifice, meat, opium, and liquor consumption, and the worship of local Shakta cults, part and parcel of local "Darbar culture," that is, practices of groups claiming to be *kshatriya*.

Hindu saintly traditions of world renunciation have often been understood as critical and opposed to the social institution of caste (Dumont 1980). In the context of a modern secular nation-state, however, sects such as Swaminarayan tend to strengthen caste ideology by becoming a repository of values and forms of religiosity that have become anachronistic. As Pocock points out, "first, the authority of the sect strengthens these regulations when secular influences would otherwise weaken them, and secondly, if these secular influences do succeed, [the] sect remains as almost the sole repository of caste values" (Pocock 1973:95).

It is hence no coincidence if some members of lower castes and classes in Ahmedabad equate Swaminarayan religion with the religion of high caste Hindus and Jains. These groups are "*ujliyat vasti*" (high population, high people), characterized by vegetarianism and a strong concern for ahimsa, not lacking of hyperbole, as is sometimes indicated cynically. In some sense, the Swaminarayan sect can thus

paradoxically be understood as an agent of Sanskritization and Srinivas (1962:154) made this point some time ago.

Besides the Patel, there are other important status groups, such as the Rajput (“*kshatriya*”), who have become increasingly identified historically with cow protection and beef prohibition. This is significant because many of those groups that claim to be “Kshatriyas” today have their origins culturally outside of Hindu society, and traditionally did not necessarily eschew beef nor cow slaughter. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, a veritable “Kshatriyaization”<sup>3</sup> process has been identified in Gujarat, where diverse groups—for example the numerous Koli—have more or less been absorbed in and come to claim Kshatriya-hood.<sup>4</sup> Even today members of non-Kshatriya upper caste groups often reference this fact by denigrating all Kshatriyas as in fact members of lower castes, or tribes distant from any aristocratic claim. Shah (1982:14-15) has pointed out the flexible nature of the category “Rajput”; its essential idea is the that of power, “and anybody who wielded power—either as a king or as a dominant group in a rural (even tribal) area—could *claim* to be Rajput.” It is important to note that in contemporary Ahmedabad, mostly

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<sup>3</sup>This process is a form of “Sanskritization,” whereby members of lower caste groups, or indigenous tribes, copy, adopt, and emulate Kshatriya attributes such as cow-protection, Goddess worship, and taking service from a Brahman. See, for example, in Shah (1975:14).

<sup>4</sup>We know comparatively little about these groups. The Koli seem to have settled in Gujarat in the nineteenth century and thus entered Hindu society only late (Shah 1955:69-70). They were known as “marauding bands” in prior centuries (Shah 1975:11-14, Enthoven Vol. 2, 1922:248pp). Shah (1982:13) draws from historical references as far back as the fifteenth century, but he also cautions that Koli have often been confused with Bhil, another tribal group. Claiming precisely that they are “civilized Bhils,” Enthoven (Vol. 2, 1922: 249), in turn, has pointed to the large number of Koli and the fact that public men in Gujarat considered them to be the original inhabitants of the Presidency. See also his interesting entry on the Bhil (Enthoven Vol.1, 1922:151pp.). Many older descriptions portray the Koli as independent, proud, and skilled in martial labor. Forbes (Vol. 2, 1878:114) mentions Koli in one breath with Rajput and Muslims as a “caste which bore arms” versus Kanbi (later Patel) and Vaniya, which were “peaceable.” Some Koli, however, seem to have settled and become Kanbi themselves. Others imitated Rajput customs, like prohibition of widow remarriage, and intermarried with Rajput in order to improve their status (Enthoven Vol.2, 1922:243, A.M. Shah 1982:13-15). Enthoven (Vol.2, 1922:243) opined that the term Koli is the corrupted form of “coolie” which Europeans used indiscriminately for manual laborers; the martial labor of pre-colonial times became the manual labor of colonial times. The term “*koli*” is often avoided by the group in question, because of its pejorative air (Shah 1975:11).

the scheduled castes and tribes are the groups feeling disadvantaged; they are claiming this “power” through reference to the category “*rajput*.”

This process is important because it elucidates how a reconstructed generalized Kshatriya identity after Independence had to expiate several things: the pro-British stance of Rajput in pre-Independence time, the opposition to Congress, as well as the tensions of caste upward mobility in a democratic political process. Caste upward mobility in the absence of a dominant Brahman class also explains the vociferousness with which Kshatriyas in Gujarat identify with cow protection and beef prohibition since Independence, long before the political success of Hindutva in Gujarat (Shah 1975:14, 25).

The *Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha*, for example, founded after 1945, has helped to unify groups of diverse socio-economic and ritual status into one caste affiliation. If the Rajput were five percent of Gujarat’s population before the consolidation of the Kshatriyas at the time of the 1931 census, the influx of other groups such as the Koli (numerically the largest social group at the time) into the affiliation of Kshatriyas increased its demographic value five fold (Shah 1975:10, Shah 1982:4). The organization agitated for “Kshatriya consciousness and unity” (Shah 1975:89), their pride and honor. In the 1960s this pride had to be combined with the somewhat contradictory political demand to be recognized as socially and economically “backward” (1975:78).

Already in 1947 the Sabha publicly opposed Gandhi’s concept of non-violence and struggled for the “birth-right of bearing the sword” as Kshatriyas. The Sabha stressed that the symbol of the sword was one of bravery; its violent use against an enemy “is not committing violence even in the eyes of law.” In the 1950s the Sabha along with other groups organized and agitated against beef consumption, cow slaughter, and the Hindu Code Bill. In 1968 during the debate on cow slaughter in the

Gujarat Assembly, a Congress member commented that “Kshatriyas also eat beef,” a statement which was understood as an insult to the entire reconstructed community (1975:74, 73,185, 76).<sup>5</sup>

The cow protection issue also has a long history. It was successively used in Hindu nationalist claims at least since the foundation of the Arya Samaj in 1875 (Pandey 1990:164pp., van der Veer 1996:83, 86pp., Jaffrelot 1996:13-17, Freitag 1980, 1996:215pp.). What is important here is that in the context of caste consolidation and upward mobility of the largest groups in Gujarat, we find the same elements that have been described elsewhere. The emergence of potent nationalist symbols is accompanied by the concern to maintain the basic elements of a traditional order and by a deep feeling of insecurity about the membership in caste society.

Many traditional and modern institutions today are identified with ahimsa, including, among others, animal shelters, the Institute of Indology, vegetarian societies, the Ahimsa Research Center at Gujarat University, and popular Gurus. Additionally, in the last decade, the Gujarati government has mobilized the doctrine of ahimsa and its association with vegetarianism, through laws on cow protection (*gaaraksha*) and slaughterhouse control. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi promulgated “ahimsa” immediately before, through, and after the violence of 2002. Far from being opposed to one another anymore, in Gujarat militant protection of the cow and ahimsa reinforce and consolidate each other.

It appears that the conjuncture of beef prohibition and ahimsa leads to a criminalization of dietary practices only of those minorities considered permanently outside Hindutva-identity. In this moral economy of food, a Hindu eating meat, as long as it is not beef, is perhaps considered sinful and secular, but he has harmed only his own community’s sentiment. A Hindu is redeemable through reform, meaning

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<sup>5</sup>For an explanation of the rivalry and mistrust between Patidar (Patel) and Rajput see Shah (1975:24-26)

education and upward mobility. But a Muslim eating meat is considered disrespectful to Gandhi. He violates the doctrine of ahimsa and the sentiment of *jivdaya* (compassion for all life) of the Gujarati elites. In addition, the absence of a beef taboo amongst Muslims, makes their behavior suspect of cow slaughter. The absence of the beef taboo amongst Muslim groups indicates the impossibility for upward mobility in questions of ritual status (caste).

Even while many *hindutvaadi* (followers of Hindutva) today affirmatively appropriate the rhetoric of Gandhi's nonviolence, they generally find his style of political activism embarrassing.<sup>6</sup> How, then, has meat eating become a virtuous emblem of secularism for some, and a stigma of disgust for Muslims or Christians that legitimizes violence against them?

#### 0.1.1 Sacrifice

Why is the Gujarat pogrom an expression of a sacrificial logic? During the pogrom, the claim to non-violence did not just mask the imagery of killing and the circulation of those images but actually seemed to foster and demand the violence. My inability to account for this within contemporary social scientific accounts led me to immerse myself in the interpretations of Vedic sacrifice and their consequent transformations, which I offer tentatively in the first chapter. The theme of early

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<sup>6</sup>This embarrassment is much older than contemporary attractiveness of Hindutva and runs deep in Gujarat. Compare, for example, one of the founders of the *Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha*, Chhatrasingh Ataliya, who conceived of a Kshatriya unity in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra against the Congress, dominated by non-Rajput upper castes. For him "Gandhi's non-violence was cowardice and therefore against his Rajput blood" already in the 1930s and 40s (Shah 1975:47). The understanding of ahimsa as cowardice reappears in different form today, as when the RSS supreme K. Sudarshan in a discussion with Jain Acharya Mahapragyaji, for example, distinguishes between "non-violence and timidity;" the former being proper, the latter cowardice, supplementing a perpetrator's strength. Sudarshan made these statements after the Godhra incident and thus indirectly rendered legitimacy to the Gujarat pogrom (*Asian Age*, August 30, 2002, p.9). The traditional antagonism between landowning Rajput and the money-lending Vaniya (*shahukars*), who professed non-violence while confiscating the landowner's farm, if debts were not paid, is described in more detail in Hardiman (1996); (cf. Shah 1975: 22pp.). Another sort of account of the legendary Vaniya is depicted in Malabari (1880[2000]: 81-87) where a Muslim King's accountant is describing in first person how he becomes rich by slowly bleeding his Muslim royal master.

Vedic sacrifice is much more complex than I am able to give credit for here and the abundance of literature, both modern and ancient, did not make my interpretation easier. But I have attempted to carve out what I consider key moments of ritual transformation that might elucidate the conundrum of violence in present-day Gujarat.

It is much out of fashion in the contemporary anthropology of South Asian to turn in any way to the insights of the field of Indology, contaminated, as it is, by colonial history. Already in the 1950s, the French anthropologist Louis Dumont had called for a fusing of methods of the social sciences with classical Indology, but Dumont's prescriptions for the study of India, today, have been largely ignored. In my case, not so much his methodological prescription but my own fieldwork confrontation with a veritable script of violence initially compelled me to reexamine the Indological literature. Although this script preceded the violence, I had been cautioned about using cultural form to account for any dimension of violence. Many contemporary analysts of violence avoid culture, dismiss it as "Brahmanical rhetoric," or locate it as part of a Hindu nationalist discourse. By the end of 2002, I was no longer able to ignore and dismiss the cultural *form* that killing took, nor the relation of cultural form and content to the rhetoric it assumed.

The questions that drive this study grow out of the following ethnographic observations:

First, during the pogroms the goods looted from Muslim shops were often referred to as *prasaada* (gifts of the gods, remains after *puja*-worship); mutilated female Muslim bodies were referred to as *khapi jay chhe* (to be spent or used, to sacrifice); killing was expressed with reference to terms, *kaapvu* (to cut) and *katal karvu* (to butcher), which usually are employed for animal slaughter by Muslim butchers; the activity of shooting and burning Muslims was referred to as *dharaavavu* (literally to make God [to be] satisfied), *homavavu* (to be offered up in fire). The

constant linguistic cross-referencing between the indigenous conceptions of ahimsa and those of sacrifice compels us to look closely to how the two are linked. How does nonviolence itself become implicated in a violence that has a sacrificial character?

Second, the violence of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms contained deep undertones of desire. Many eye-witnesses have affirmed my own observation that the massacres at places such as Naroda Patia or Gulbarg society were organized like festivals, with tea-stalls offering water and tea free of charge, while a mob moved into the minority neighborhoods, sometimes aided by the police. In the first three weeks of violence, I too, saw very little genuine anger but a lot of pubescent fascination as mobs, which included many spectators, coalesced and acted.

In contradistinction to these empirical observations, the *Sangh Parivar* as well as the Gujarat government called the festival of violence an expression of spontaneous “Hindu anger” (*Hindu krodh*), a designation that subsequently became widely accepted. What is the nature of this anger in the name of those who are considered “harmless,” “vegetarian,” and “vulnerable”? What most shocked me in field research was the enigmatic form of participation of many Gujaratis, their fascination with and consent to the imagery of killing.

The absence of guilt of many Gujaratis after the violence is a point in question. Neither local activist reports nor international investigations, like those of Human Rights Watch, do, understandably, speculate on the psychological states of the perpetrators of the Gujarat pogrom. Some individual activists, witnesses, and lay observers alike, however, have acknowledged these various states of desire. The desire to harm and the satisfaction derived out of it is the single most important factor rarely mentioned in either description or analyses of the pogroms. This desire was palpable at the time, as I depict it in chapter two, though it tends to be denied today.



That there might be pleasure in violence seems, of course, a dark statement, and in Gujarat, especially, it borders on the absurd.

It seems particularly absurd because of the pride of Gujaratis in the practice of ahimsa in its many forms was not only referred to during the violence but is integral to a generalized Gujarati identity. If ahimsa indeed is the “absence of the desire to harm” (Biardeau 1989), what then is this strange modern ahimsa, what kind of transformations have taken place, so that the concept of nonviolence comes to haunt the mind of Gujaratis in the moment when killing is at its height? This all will become clearer, I hope, and make much more sense, when related to experiences of the everyday depicted in the ethnographic part of this dissertation. These experiences include, most prominently, a) caste upward mobility, b) resentment against Mahatma Gandhi, c) problems of marriage and sexuality, d) the inscription of two moiety communities into urban space through city markers such as borders and temples, e) abstinence from meat-eating and f) the (un)consciousness of animal sacrifice.

Third, actual animal sacrifices in rural, and especially urban, central Gujarat are disappearing. Modern ethnographers have documented the general tendency toward the disappearance of animal sacrifice (Fuller 1992, Staal 1983, Schnepel 1995), including in the state of Gujarat (Shah and Shroff 1958, Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal 1976, Pocock 1973, Hardiman 1987, Tambs-Lyche 1992) and the emergence of animal protection movements, which is contemporaneous with an increase in communal violence.<sup>7</sup> Gandhi’s use of ahimsa already contained many different possible objects, encompassing the non-violent struggle against the British,

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<sup>7</sup>In a series of interesting and perceptive articles *Frontline Magazine* discusses, amongst other things, the activism against animal sacrifice by *Sangh Parivar* institutions in South India. See “An age-old practice,” and “A decree on animal sacrifice,” both by S. Vishwanathan, Vol. 20, September 27-October 10, 2003. In Tamil Nadu, a state law banning animal sacrifice existed since 1950 (Tamil Nadu Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prevention Act), but it was barely been enforced until the AIADMK government, headed by the Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, came to power. Compare also “The Spread in the South” where S.R. Raghunathan, Vol. 21, March 13-March 26, 2004 states that Jayalalithaa was finally forced to annul the act due to pressure from “disadvantaged sections.”

the specific dietary practices to which he held, and the abolition of animal sacrifice (Gandhi 1927). In urban Gujarat people fantasize about it and despised groups are accused of it, but the enactment of animal sacrifice has become a secret of the lower castes.<sup>8</sup>

This disappearance makes communal violence appear like a return--an acting out--of a blood sacrifice that has been lost. There are only two sites where the trope of sacrifice (re)appears to a conscious public. One is in Muslim areas, for Muslims always procure their own meat slaughtered *halal*; they are the butchers and own most slaughterhouses in the city. It is Muslim festivals, such as Bakri-Id for example, which are identified with blood sacrifices, whereas public Hindu festivals such as Navratri have become vegetarian affairs today. Thus animal sacrifice reappears most dramatically in the phantasmatic figure of the Muslim butcher.

The other site is the nationalist rhetoric of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the cultural and religious wing of the nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the sacrificial language used during anti-Muslim agitation and pogroms. The VHP prefers “Vedic” terms like *yagna* (sacrifice), *balidaan* (blood sacrifice), *agni-snan* (self-immolation), and employs endless variations of these in Hindutva

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<sup>8</sup>The most aggressive movements against any form of animal sacrifice in contemporary Gujarat are led by organizations that stand ideologically close, or indeed belong to, the vast net of *Sangh Parivar* institutions. But opposition to religious practices such as animal sacrifice--either considered a primitive remnant of the past or the practice of “uncivilized” groups--are not limited to one political grouping alone. M.N. Srinivas alluded some time ago to the Congress campaigns against blood sacrifices in the state of Mysore in his discussion of his then brand new concept of “Sanskritization” (1956:486). The same could be said for Gujarat, where Gandhian activism paved the way for antisacrifice agitation long ago. The difference between prior notions and the present pressures by the *Sangh Parivar* consists not so much in whether or not animal sacrifices should be abolished in the long run. In Tamil Nadu, neither the DMK, nor the two communist parties, although critical of Jayalithaa, would explicitly endorse the practice of animal sacrifice, for example. Only Dalit activists and institutions protested (see preceding footnote). Rather, the difference between past and present lies in the rhetoric of violence, that is, in which way a legitimate violence is made to (re)appear on stage. In Gujarat, *Sangh Parivar* organizations differ from Congress by mobilizing a very specific nationalist rhetoric, in which national self-sacrifice reverts back into sacrifice, understood as a legitimize violence against minorities, while some of its cultural organizations simultaneously protest against animal sacrifices and cow slaughter in the name of *ahimsa* and *jivdayaa*.

rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> Hindu organizations are not only indirectly referring to national sacrifice, as many nationalist movements worldwide have in the past, but they literally enact sacrifice through *seva* (service), the sacrifice of the self for a cause. As Jaffrelot argues, in the context of the revival of the Ayodhya issue in the 1980's, young Bajrang Dal members were systematically taught "how to be bold" (1996:363). At the Rath Yatra in 1990 in Ahmedabad, one Bajrang Dal member, preparing for the Babri Masjid demolition two years later, literally offered blood by applying a *tilak* (sign) of his own blood to L.K. Advani's forehead.<sup>10</sup> In Jetpur near Rajkot, "about a hundred more offered him a jar full of their own blood" (1996:417).

The difficulty in studying animal sacrifice in central and urban Gujarat is how to study something that has empirically disappeared from sight and is usually bluntly denied. The pogrom has alleviated that problem. Immediately before, during, and in the aftermath of the Gujarat pogrom the language of slaughter and animal sacrifice was ubiquitous. In this way one can follow the remains of the vanishing: There is a lot of talk of sacrifice despite the fact that the animal blood sacrifices with which many groups were until recently identified are only carried out with secrecy or in privacy in central Gujarat. This confronts us with a rhetorical reappearance of sacrificial terminology in nationalist rhetoric.

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<sup>9</sup>The "Vedic" terminology employed by the VHP is not necessarily accurate from any sober philological perspective. What is significant is the notion of origin, even if not every term can be traced properly to some ancient form of Sanskrit. But even in those cases where the expert would doubt "Vedic" (or "Aryan") origin, the terms are nonetheless, and explicitly, understood to stand for an ancient past associated with the "Vedic." This is the case with words such as "*prasaada*" or "*puja*," for example, whose origins are much more complex. In other words, the "Vedic" in Gujarat is a category indebted to contemporary nationalist imaginings, and philology simply serves those ends. At its core, this discourse seeks to define and circumscribe a "Hindu essence" through reference to a distant past, be it Vedic, Upanishadic (often understood as the "Vedic" proper), Puranic or otherwise. For an interesting discussion of the complex relation between Indian languages and their mutual borrowings, especially Sanskrit and Dravidian through *tadbhava* and *tatsama* forms, see Staal (1963). These insights render intelligible the complications with concepts such as "Sanskritization," if this word is taken too literally.

<sup>10</sup>These acts are reminiscent of what Enthoven (Vol. 1, 1922:153-54) describes between Bhil and Rajput, "At the accession of a Rajput prince, blood taken from the thumb or toe of a Bhil was smeared on his forehead. This was known as *Tika*."

The animal victim in sacrifice in prior times was a means to communicate with the sacred. In the act of killing, a deity was addressed (identification) and simultaneously held at a distance (substitution). Even if vegetable substitutes, or rice cakes, were used instead of live animals, they were “killed,” “throttled,” and “smothered” while precautions were taken against the violence committed (Schwab 1886, Thite 1970, Smith and Doniger 1989). Relevant here is Freud’s insight, that an ambivalent emotion structures the relation towards the sacred, and towards the killing in sacrifice (originally, towards the father “killed and consumed”).

Where, then, did this aggressive impulse toward the sacred go? How was the ambivalence resolved? If the animal victim in prior times was a conduit to an outside, then what has happened to the disappearance of the animal in sacrifice? Or, put differently, in no longer conceiving violence in sacrificial practices such as *puja* worship, where did the killing go? Did this disappearance lead to a displacement of the agonistic sentiment outside of the worship ritual confines of the sacrifice?

Fourth, many middle-class and upper caste Hindus strongly identify with ahimsa and vegetarianism, yet they also feel victimized and vulnerable. This sense of victimization was especially prominent in the face of pogrom violence that targeted not them, but minority Muslims, as it has also in the past decade. Especially in Gujarat, vegetarianism, or meat consumption, communicates much more than just dietary preferences or community traditions. Dietary practices themselves are a veritable script that index status and membership in caste and community, sexual potency, and most importantly, moral qualities of groups such as proneness to aggression, compassion, and vulnerability.

These ethnographic observations, even if overdrawn, speak to each other in that they exemplify the historical transformation of ahimsa: a movement from identification as ingestion of the animal in sacrificial substitution, to renunciation and

complementarity, to disgust (de-ingestion) and identification with the animal against others.

#### 0.1.2 Transformations of *ahimsa*

Sacrifice is intimately connected to the deployment of *ahimsa* (non-violence), a complicated concept that has undergone a series of significant transformations. The term *ahimsa*, the “absence of desire to kill” (Biardeau 1989[1981]:31), or the “non-desire-to-carry-out-any-attack” (Oguibénine 2003[1994]:65), is a privative compound word composed of the negative prefix *a*, followed by the radical *hims*, a form of the desiderative mode of the radical *han*, meaning to assault, to kill (ibid.). According to the Indologist Louis Renou, privative compound words in Sanskrit are infinitely more nuanced than their positive reversals, conjuring up an entire world of possible meanings (Oguibénine 2003:66). The positive counterparts are semantically more scarce compared to the negative forms such as *abhaya*, *amrta*, *advaita*, *avidya*, *adroha*, terms which allow for a scattering of meaning with connotations of their own (Gonda 1959:100).<sup>11</sup>

In the case of ideal states such as *abhaya* (fearlessness, security), *amrta* (non-death, immortality) or *ahimsa* (non-injury, harmlessness), the positive terms stands not only for one single reality, but that reality is also to be denied in its negative reversal. As Gonda has argued, these realities must have caused such strong emotions that their reversals not only expressed that which is logically opposed to the idea of fearing, dying, or injuring, but also that which is “emotionally opposed, or inconsistent with these notions” (1959:103). Thus the need to overcome the ubiquity of death or evil,

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<sup>11</sup>For example, whereas *bhay* means fear, *abhaya* (non-fear) means also security, peace, confidence, and non-violence; *mṛta* is death but *amṛta* (non-death) is immortal, imperishable, not subject to decay, continuity of life, vitality; *dvaita* is duality, *advaita* non-duality, the term used for Vedānta monist thought; *vidyā* is knowledge but *avidyā* (non-knowledge) also ignorance; *droha* means hostile but *adroha*, benevolence, “absence of a stern or non-friendly attitude,” non-anger (Oguibénine 2003:66, Gonda 1959:95-117).

for example, was so strong that the word for it must be pronounced “together with the rejection of its being realized” (103).

In consequence the positive root *hims* connotes a type of evil inherent in the desire to kill, which is negated, creating a positive term (ahimsa), which is the negation of the former (Oguibénine 2003:67). Thus good is always evil negated, and if “the term ahimsa itself is affirmative and positive, it continues to bear traces of that which is negated: the desire to kill is offset by the affirmation of another desire, that of not killing” (67). These two aspirations are clearly designated in the compound form of the terms in question. “[I]t represents the frequent and typical to and fro swing of ancient India, which places opposites, the positive and the negative, on the same plane” (67). It is this to and fro swing that I indicate, when I try to explain the thumbnail version of ahimsa in chapter five.<sup>12</sup>

The reconstructions of Indologists replicate some of my ethnographic material. It shows the sequential movement from I) ingestion *of* an animal and the circulation of death II) to substitution of words and animals in the classic ritual III) to renunciation and self-sacrifice IV) to complementarity of purity and pollution V) to the emergence of an “active *ahimsa*” for anti-colonial struggle in Gandhi VI) to loss of complementarity, the deployment of disgust, and the emergence of a new form of identification *with* an animal victim against Muslims in central Gujarat today. This line of investigation asks how there can be such a thing as identification with *ahimsa* in a society that today is fascinated by violence.

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<sup>12</sup>Although these insights helped me to formulate the “thumbnail version of ahimsa” in chapter five, I discovered Oguibénine’s (2003) insightful piece some time after having returned from the field. The major conceptual work of my dissertation had already been completed. The volume of which it is part of is an excellent discussion of ahimsa in Indian traditions, past and contemporary, with special emphasis on sacrifice. It aligns itself well with many of my ethnographic insights about the rhetorical usages of ahimsa in contemporary Gujarat. An excellent discussion on ahimsa and privative compound words in Vedic literature can also be found in Gonda (1959).

Chapter one describes the transformations of ahimsa (movement I-VI) in a relatively short synthetic chapter. The rest of the dissertation (chapters two through nine) elaborates solely on movement VI: loss of complementarity, identification against Muslims, and the emergence of disgust. It is in contemporary Gujarat that I situate a new form of relationship to the animal, which eschews identification as ingestion and instead prefers compassion for all life (*jivdayaa*), which includes disgust for animal flesh. Disgust with flesh however, like contamination with violence, migrates and attaches itself to those who are identified with its ingestion. Thus disgust becomes an important aspect of group identification in communal Gujarat where the circulation of stigma and stereotype is rampant. In the confusion of identities and identifications, disgust makes possible the stability of an ego torn apart by experiences of disappointment, rejection, and forbidden desire.

My interpretation does not follow along the path of a genetic development of a topic, such as, say, ahimsa, but derives its insight from a working-through (*Auseinandersetzung*)<sup>13</sup> of tensions experienced in the field. If I were to trace the chronology of my own insights into sacrifice, ahimsa, and vegetarianism, I would have to reorganize the chronology of the chapters in this dissertation starting with the accounts of violence and a perceptible cultural change in the Gujarat of the 1990s, and the advance of the BJP to power. At the end would stand an analysis of media imagery during the pogrom, and of the concept of non-violence in ancient Vedic sacrifice.

I have reorganized this chronological code and partly reversed the order to counter the ethnographer's tendency towards naïveté about what preceded their encounter with the field, including their own graphing of the ethnos, which is

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<sup>13</sup>*Durcharbeiten* (working through) and *Auseinandersetzung* (literally, a setting apart and a taking apart; but also a confrontation, a conflict) are important words in the German language, but amount to veritable methods in Freud. In this dissertation I attempt an *Auseinandersetzung* with modern *ahimsa* in Gujarat, which will, I hope, leave neither me, nor the concept, unscathed.

understood to follow, never to precede the experience of the social. I did not want to mistake my own mode of entry into a specific field of knowledge as the very structure of that field. Although I trace one particular genealogy of this script here to ancient sacrifice, there might be others. For instance, there is a colonial script (or several colonial scripts), which is the proper field of study for historians. This is not to dismiss historical insight, but my admittance of incompetence in it.

This dissertation elaborates time not as a linear sequencing but in the sense of a paradigmatic structure of ritual, which elaborates and tracks the problem of violence from the earliest records to the present. I follow the anthropological insight of Levi-Strauss (1966) that “symbolic form” (culture) is not just a temporal sequence of things, adapted and discarded, reinventing itself at every moment in history, but it retains things (transformation) through a set of differences and counter-concepts in other than conscious ways. I am also very indebted to Reinhardt Koselleck’s idea of asymmetrical historical counter-concepts (1985). Three concepts-- substitution, complementarity, and identification--perhaps are a beginning to see how ancient Vedic sacrifice speaks to contemporary communal violence.

There are also particular narratives of groups and castes like Rajput, Bhil, Vagri, Koli, Kureishi, Adivasi, Chamar, Bohra, Jain, etc., in relation to sacrifice and violence, that I touch only briefly here, if at all. I leave this work to specialized ethnographers working on these groups.

### 0.1.3 Violence and Hindutva

Following the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Indian constitution constructed the state as a secular democracy. The state of Gujarat, established in 1960, has nonetheless experienced repeated religious agitation and communalization, especially due to democratization, deindustrialization, the gradual de-institutionalization of the Indian state of the late 1970s (Basu and Kohli 1998), the



entry into competitive politics of lower castes in 1980s (Jaffrelot 2003), and the decline of civil society (Varshney 2002). As ethno-religious identifications are increasingly tied to a political electoral process, traditional religious and cultural practices relating to diet and worship are simultaneously redefined.

Although India is celebrated for its diversity, in central Gujarat difference is now mediated through an essentialized Hindu-Muslim divide. Gujarat had witnessed violence in every decade since its inception in 1960, and central Gujarat, with particular emphasis on Ahmedabad, is considered one of the most “communal” states in India. Communal violence has been repetitive--1969, 1985, 1986, 1990, 1992, 2002--and this is not to speak of the many smaller clashes and conflicts that are not given much media play. It seems that the larger the number of deaths, the more likely a bout of violence is remembered in a government report, a scholarly book, or an activist account. The real picture is thus much more sinister than it appears.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of 1990s, communal violence emerged in a heightened context of nonviolent self-identification as Hindus. In Gujarat this violence is nurtured by an identification with *ahimsa*, where the “harmless,” vegetarian Hindus all of a sudden become the *krodh hindu*, the “angry Hindu,” the “*hindutvavadi*”, the followers of Hindutva. In contrast to public perception, Muslims have numerically been the major victims in most riots back since 1969, a fact vigorously denied by many Gujaratis if one is foolish enough to state it.

This dissertation is not a study of Hindutva, although some understanding of that contemporary ideology is essential to explain the final transformation of *ahimsa* that is my subject. Hindutva offers an interpretation of “Hinduism” as a historical

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<sup>14</sup>In fact one can securely say, as Brass has pointed out recently (2003), that in many regions and areas there is no year passing without communal clashes of some sort. Identifying “riots” or “pogroms” and locating them in time has itself become a politically significant act. Spodek (1989:766) traces Ahmedabad’s endemic violence even further back to episodes in 1941, 1942, 1946, 1956, 1958, 1964, 1969, and includes 1974, 1981. Varshney (2002) begins his analysis only in the 1950s.

subject threatened by Islam and Christianity. It portrays Hindus as victims of Muslim barbarism, slaughtered and humiliated, butchered and raped, in a strange mimetic reversal of what I witnessed in Ahmedabad's anti-Muslim pogrom. It illustrates a specific pattern of identification exemplary for the shift between older generations of many overtly secular Indian leaders identified with the Congress Party to a younger one dominated by the Hindu nationalist BJP (Jaffrelot 1993, Blom Hansen 1999, Varma 1998). Blom Hansen has pointed out that "Hindu majoritarianism" is much larger than the RSS or the *Sangh Parivar* and fed by many other forces such as "plebeianization' of public culture," anxieties about consumption, longing for global recognition, and a "communal unconscious," which can be mobilized (1999:214-236).

There is another "threat" standing behind the phantasmatic Muslim, however, which is the large cluster of groups, members of castes, which had not received recognition for their claims at the time of Independence. The OBCs (other backward classes) have gained much political influence in recent years, which has resulted in the perception of a "plebeian threat" from below in the middle classes especially in North India (Blom Hansen 1999:141-145, see also Jaffrelot 2003). Hindutva's electoral success in Gujarat can be traced to its claim to unify the lower castes with the "Savarnas" (high caste: Brahman, Vaniya inclusive of Jain) and the Patel (formerly lower caste) as "Hindus" through the promise of upward mobility, and in opposition to Muslims and Christians, who are positioned as foreigners. I trace the effects of these unifying claims by following the life stories of five individuals: two members of high caste middle class, one Jain and one Brahman; a Dalit who receives a middle class income; and two upwardly mobile Rajput, members of the OBC (other backward classes).

In the 1980s Gujarat witnessed repeated and severe caste violence after the Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki had announced the increase of reserved seats in

government and educational institutions following the Mandal Commission recommendations.<sup>15</sup> The cluster of castes called “Kshatriyas,” of which Solanki was himself member of, comprised 25% of the population of the state (Spodek 1989). Solanki’s announcement was violently opposed by college students of upper caste and class background with support of their guardians who felt alienated from political representation. The clashes were initially mostly between upper caste affiliates (inclusive of the Patel besides Brahman and Vaniya) and members of backward groups. First government property was attacked, but within a few months Ahmedabad was in the middle of complete chaos including policemen collectively attacking Dalit neighborhoods, underworld dons of the illegal liquor trade organizing assassinations, and the emergence of neighborhood weapon factories. It is in this chaos that a caste conflict turned communal. The violence culminated in six full months of “riots” from February through July in 1985 leaving 275 dead (Spodek 1989, Wood 1987, Sheth and Menon 1986).<sup>16</sup>

Solanki, a Congress Chief Minister, had ignored the suggestions of the Rane Commission of 1983, the members of which he himself had appointed.

The Commission had “recommended reservation on the bases of social, economic, educational and occupational standards, not caste” (Spodek 1989:768, Sheth and Menon 1986:12). Thus Solanki’s decision seemed to many but an extension of the electoral “KHAM” coalition strategy (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim), which had been devised and successfully pursued in the late 1970s, but which also had politically marginalized the influential Patel community (Sheth and

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<sup>15</sup>The political potential of the Social and Educational Backward Classes (SEBC)--usually referred to as OBC (other backward classes)--was first discovered in the 1970s by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 1980, the Mandal Commission recommended 27% reservation for these groups in all educational and governmental jobs. They had originally been identified in the 1950s, soon after Independence, but the large quotas suggested for these sections have never been implemented.

<sup>16</sup>“Soon, everybody was fighting everybody, especially in urban pockets like Ahmedabad. The upper castes were fighting the lower castes, the working class had turned against the middle class, Hindus and Muslims screamed for each other’s blood, the police were battling the people, and the press was fighting Solanki” (Sheth and Menon 1986:22).

Menon 1986:21-22, 86-).<sup>17</sup> What had started as severe caste conflict culminated a year later in communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, a telling tale of violent transformation (Spodek 1989, Sheth and Menon 1986, van der Veer 1996: 261). In chapter eight, I suggest, that such transformation of social conflicts into communal conflict has become endemic today.

Hindutva of the 1990s seems in many ways to be a formidable answer to the experiences of the 1980s, and in 2003, Chief Minister Narendra Modi, in a nod to the eighties, ironically dubbed his own political program “KHAW” (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, and Women.) The “M” of KHAM was reversed into the “W” of KHAW. The “joke” was to mean that a generalized woman replaces the Muslim. “M” became “W.”

Another explanation of the attractiveness of religious nationalisms such as “Hindutva” is that they are part of a cultural-political dynamic of the non-Western world, where (Western) secularism itself is rejected as a form of colonial “culture” (Juergensmeyer 1993). Pandey (1990) has argued for British India that in the 1920s with the entry of the “masses” into organized politics a new anti-colonial nationalism emerged, which was not only influenced by a colonial discourse in conceptions of rationality and secularism. According to Pandey, it also created the nationalist version of “communalism,” understanding communitarian forms of identification as retrograde and to be overcome.

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<sup>17</sup>It is important to note that the enmity between groups considered “*kshatriya*” and the Patidar (Patel) runs deep historically. Patel used to be considered *shudra*, but during Moghul, and later British times, they were able to improve their social positioning (Shah 1975:24). Shah argues that the traditional rivalry between the two is based on the defeat of the Rajput by Moghul armies, which aided the Patel to rise to political influence. They had been animal husbandmen until then (1975: 24). In the mid fifties the Saurashtrian Kanbi Patel, who had been tillers for Rajput landowners, “Overnight, (...) became landlords,” due to a sweeping land reform (Sheth and Menon 1986:88). Another aspect of the early politicization of rural Patel had been the reliance of Sadar Vallabhai Patel and Mahatma Gandhi on them during major *satyagrahas* in the struggle for Independence. The antagonisms between Patel and Kshatriyas--palpable up until the end 1980s--seems to have been successfully eclipsed through the Hindutva model, which externalizes Muslims and Christians in turn. The newly found unity, even if volatile, places all antagonism onto Muslims and Christians.

Seen as necessary before, now religious divisions had to be transcended by focusing, for example, on “essentials” of respective religious traditions (236), which were formulated by national leaders such as Tilak and Gandhi. These leaders stood in competition with religious reform movements such as the Arya Samaj, and were influenced by the nineteenth century Hindu revival. The core of this new strategy was to find those symbols that could unify the “Hindu community” like cow protection or the opposition to Muslims. According to Pandey the colonial version of “communalism” was a form of knowledge that lent continuity to a series of discrepant social conflicts and tensions through the construction of one single master narrative. This single narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict was assimilated into the conception of a hierarchy of the cultures of India thus into the cry for a Hindu India in the communalist narrative (260-1), a narrative that has become dominant in Gujarat today.

Part and parcel of this process has been a sophisticated colonial sociology, which not only de-contextualized instances of community conflict but classified group characteristics as well. Whereas the village community was conceived as the basic unit of Indian society by the colonial state’s administration in the early nineteenth century, caste became the major organizing principle in colonial records in the second half of the century (67). After the Great Rebellion of 1857 the British state assumed direct rule and “the interest in the institution of caste intensified” (Dirks 2001: 15). Some authors have stressed how colonial administrative practices such as census operations substantiated, or severely confused categories of religious membership into synthetic aggregates of identity such as “Hindu” and “Muslim,” which in many parts of India did not necessarily make much empirical sense (Cohn 1996, Metcalf 1995, Dirks 2001). These approaches have clarified the importance of colonial practices, but they have contributed very little to understanding why the divisions emphasized

rightly or wrongly by the colonial master narrative were so successful and are salient even today.

Louis Dumont (1980: 314-334), in turn, has stressed that the fusion between Hindus and Muslims in pre-colonial time was merely a cultural one (319). He argues that the estrangement between Hindus and Muslims immediately preceding Independence had its roots in an unresolved relationship between the two, allowing for hostility to erupt and subside in fast succession (320). Often in stark opposition to these assertions, however, other scholars have elaborated how the tolerant “composite culture” and unique cultural synthesis of regional religious practices in South Asia do not allow for clear-cut distinctions between religious communities along the lines of entities such as “Islam” and “Hinduism” (Ahmad 1985, 1978, Das 1984, Nandy 1990, Kothari 1970, Mayaram 1997). Although some of these authors have produced valuable insights into the *Lebenswelt* (life-world) and history of so-called Hindu or Muslim communities respectively, they have not always been able to explain, why despite all the facts to the contrary, a binary such as Hindu-Muslim can carry so much salience; why its fault lines frequently appear and disappear with pernicious effects and plays such an important role in the political life of Northern India. Van der Veer, in turn, has cautioned that conceptions, such as “tolerance” or “syncretism,” belong securely to the discursive strategies of nationalism trying to establish and validate “national culture” (1996: 201), and thus should not be projected back to pre-modern or traditional practices as, for example, Nandy (1990) does in an arguably polemical, but interesting, piece.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Pandey comes very close to Dumont’s position, when he argues that with the transformation of the conception of the nation as a collection of communities to that of it as a collection of individual citizens, the concept of communalism was fully articulated (1990: 210). According to Dumont, it

is this same tension that gives birth to the hybrid of communalism, an ambiguous formation that mobilizes not religion but a “shadow of religion,” a political Janus that looks forward and backward simultaneously (Dumont 1980:314-318). Where both disagree is not so much on the role of British colonialism in the alienation of Hindus and Muslims, as on the conception of the community in pre-colonial times, the nature of what is called “traditional society.”

Following Marcel Mauss, Dumont (1980:445) conceptualizes the nation as predicated on a relationship of individual citizen to a nation without intermediary, the result of a process Mauss called “moral integration,” reminiscent to the Weberian *Vergesellschaftung* (sociation). In contradistinction, Pandey seems to conceive alternative forms of nationalism that allow groups to be integrated as collectivities into the nation without the pressure of assimilation. The question that is elided by Pandey, however, and emphasized by Dumont, is about the nature of religious authority as well as the nature of community boundaries in general, which, according to Dumont, are always legitimized through religion.

To put it another way, the failure of “social fusion,” despite the many instances of “cultural fusion” in India, explicated by Dumont, is essentially a question of marriage, which lies at the heart of community boundaries everywhere. Here, of course, Louis Dumont is implicitly following Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969), conceiving of the absence of general marital exchange as encouraging boundary formation and potential conflict.

In that vein, one might extend this insight further, and argue that the all-to-willing alienation between Hindus and Muslims in the immediate precursor to Independence must be explained *in spite of* the unique cultural fusion that Indian pre-colonial culture exemplified. Dumont indeed acknowledges the unique cultural fusion while not elaborating on it substantially. His insistence on identifying two opposed

value models for Hindus and Muslims, however, seems too synthetic and indebted solely to guard his own approach, placing much Weberian emphasis on core values, from unraveling at the seams. Dumont had given much weight to Brahmanical ideology and the processes that sustain it. This approach, dominant for so long, has been criticized thoroughly (Das 1977, 1995, Burghart 1978, Berreman 1979, Dirks 1987, Raheja 1988, Quigley 1993).

The difference between Pandey and Dumont is exemplary for a tension within the academic field of India studies today, and best represented by that fact that Dumont is, through one of his teachers Marcel Mauss, Durkheimian. Pandey certainly is not. Durkheim conceived of all social and cultural configurations and arrangements as essentially coercive, whereas Pandey speaks in a discursive world in which “community” does not necessarily mean the aggressive self-policing of boundaries. In Pandey, a traditional community, minus colonialism and modernity, remains somewhat innocent, whereas in Dumont it is not, because for him all community essentially is socio-centric, and tends to close in upon itself. I believe that in this respect Dumont shows more parsimony than Pandey, which is not to say that one has to accept all of Dumont’s assumptions about caste.

Consequently, Pandey appeals better to an American discursive field, where the tension between “culture” and “society” is conceived very differently than it was by Durkheim. Émile Durkheim, although secular, was of orthodox Jewish background and his family was from Alsace, where he grew up, carrying an unambiguous German name. In 1870 Alsace-Lorraine had already been occupied by Prussian troops, exacerbating anti-semitic tendencies within the French citizenry. The area has been aggressively claimed by the two emergent enemy nations Germany and France until the end of World War Two. The theme of modern nationalism is palpable throughout Durkheim’s work when conceptualizing “collective consciousness” or



“effervescence,” even if Durkheim emplots his experiences safely in the “elementary forms” of Australia. Whereas for Dumont the divisions that led to the establishment of two countries were exacerbated by colonial practices, the motor of division was the principle of caste and community in general. If the coercive “social” itself is the problem in Dumont, for Pandey it is colonialism, which is responsible for alienation.

Van der Veer (1996:92), too, is critical of attributing contemporary communal violence solely to British colonialism or modernity. While he emphasizes the continuity of nationalist and religious discourse which are both about transcendence and heresy, he is most interested in the communicative aspect of ritual and religious modes of communication, which, to be sure, passed through significant transformations in the colonial period (78pp.).

Both van der Veer and Pandey place much emphasis on the cow protection movement. While Pandey (1990) understands the movement as expressive of the desire of the lower caste groups to aspire to new status and power, van der Veer instead stresses the ritual significance of the cow as mother in symbolizing the nation (1996:86pp., compare also the insightful work of McKean 1998:259-280). In addition to his focus on ritual communication instead of master narrative, van der Veer alludes to the fact that ahimsa derives out of what he calls a “sphere” of sacrifice which he understands as distinct from asceticism (1996:96). As I demonstrate in chapter one, however, renunciation is continuous with, merely a transformation of, sacrifice, not distinct from it. Because van der Veer has not thought through the transformative logic of sacrifice, he then fails to account for how dietary practices themselves could consequently become the site for ritual communication in India, which is odd given the pervasiveness of food and eating in anthropological accounts.

Following Charles Taylor van der Veer understands ritual communication to be a locus for “self-awareness”. Through self-awareness, ritual is integral to making a

person (80). My fieldwork demonstrates the diametrical opposite, that is, I show how ritualized collective action tries to get rid of the awareness of the self in the moment when “*hindu jagruti*” (Hindu awakening) is claimed. The Hindu awoken in anger forgets who he is and acts as collective. The so-called “awakening” that Hindu nationalism claimed in Gujarat is not to a particular self, whose struggles and conflicts are of absolutely no interest. Rather, it was *the* Hindu as an incarnation of anger, pure sentiment, and affect, and thus pure un-self-consciousness that was addressed. In contradistinction to van der Veer, I would argue that to become Hindu in Gujarat means to empty oneself of that very self that says “I” in order to become one with the moment that precedes all distinction and discrimination: the Oneness with Mother in the name “Hindu.” It is in this moment when there can be a reversion back to a blood sacrifice, an act, which preceded ontogenetically the ethicization of ahimsa.

There has recently been a growing literature on violence in South Asia and elsewhere. Kakar (1995) insists “communal riots” have a distinct form, repetitive in nature and involving mimetic identifications between Hindus and Muslims with regard to memory and partition. Blom Hansen (1999) has stressed that communal violence is the underside of national identity in a middle class fraught with anxieties (217). As we have seen some have attributed religious conflict in India to caste and class dynamics (Nandy et. al. 1995, Sheth and Menon 1986, Pandey 1990). Others focus on cyclical occurrences of ethnic, caste-specific, or religious violence, theorized as a “sacrificial crisis” (Girard 1977), “rebounding violence” Bloch (1992), “ritualization,” “routinization,” and “parochialization of violence” Tambiah (1996), the absence of civil society (Varshney 2002), and “institutionalized riot systems” (Brass 2003). Das (1990, 1995) bears witness to the suffering of victims, for the “common sharing of pain” is part of the memory work necessary to deal with communal violence.

Gyan Pandey (1992) has pointed out, that the historical investigations of violence in India have in general served to elucidate “everything that happens around violence,” while the violence itself was assumed to be understood and known (27).<sup>18</sup> The same could be said, I believe, for political scientists, sociologists, and even anthropologists writing on communal violence in India. This dissertation seeks to avoid this wrenching away of violence through the substitution of “explanation.”

#### 0.1.4 Relation of research to existing literature

This investigation of how a doctrine of non-violence becomes implicated in the production of violence builds upon extensive research on culinary practices, Muslim-Hindu relations, and violence in politico-religious fields. The classification of food substances in India is connected to culinary ethics, implying the convergence of moral, social, medical, cosmological, and soteriological dimensions (Lévi-Strauss 1966, Parry 1985, Appadurai 1988, Ramanujan 1999). In addressing prohibitions on meat and beef eating (Mitra 1872, Kapadia 1933, Ambedkar 1948, Alsdorf 1962, Lal 1967, Harris 1966, Laidlaw 1995, Jha 2002), many scholars argue that the moral quality of substances are at the base of Indian food classifications (Cohen 1998, Gupta 1998, Daniel 1984, Kurin 1984, Beck 1969, Zimmerman 1987, Khare 1966, 1976, Obeyesekere 1976, Appadurai 1981). Marriott’s (1976, 1978) transactional and interactionist theory revolves around food exchange suggesting a positive correlation between intimacy and rank, whereas Dumont’s (1980) structural theory classifies food as potential pollutants in a (Hindu) complementary scheme of purity versus impurity, the basic principle of the caste system that ranks all groups in an encompassing whole. Douglas (1966) relates such categories metonymically, as parts of a symbolic system, where caste pollution, by extension, would be based on the image of opening and

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<sup>18</sup>Pandey wrote the piece after experiencing the Bhagalpur “riots” in 1989 as part of an investigatory team under the aegis of the PUDR (People’s Union for Democratic Rights).

closing orifices of the physical body, which is then projected onto the body politic. Another mode of inquiry is to examine meat as an ecological, rational economic fact (Harris 1980, Fiddes 1991, Batra 1981, Mintz 1985).

This dissertation analyzes food as a human, symbol-producing project of “ingestion” and “excretion,” with meat-eating and vegetarianism as counter-concepts used to map out differences in the moral qualities of groups (Fuss 1995, Koselleck 1985), which then are used to motivate and rationalize political violence. It documents how food has become a symbolic force for political identification, often associated anachronistically with a national ahimsa, generalized notions of “Hindu pacifism” and “Hindu spiritualism” (Staal 1983, van der Veer 1996, Pinch 2000, Vidal et.al. 2003) or, negatively valorized, as “Hindu weakness” and emasculation (Nandy 1980, Blom Hansen 1999, McKean 1997, Roy 1998).<sup>19</sup>

Appadurai (1988) contends that food in India was traditionally tied to a careful production of intimacy while the emergence of a national cuisine(s) spurred by print-media in a post-industrial and post-colonial context led to set of generalized gastroethnic images (1988). I argue that the political mobilization of the middle classes in Gujarat has given ahimsa a new semantic and political valence, which not only claims Hindu victim-hood from colonialism, but more importantly creates the minority Muslim populations as its negation, as they are frequently associated with Pakistani-sponsored terrorism, animal slaughter, and disgust.

### 0.1.5 Methodology and ethnography

I had decided early on in my fieldwork *not* to work on one specific social group or caste in Ahmedabad. I was interested in the dynamic that constitutes the aggregates “Hindu” and “Muslim,” their relationship, and what accounts for their

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<sup>19</sup>Staal (1983: 464), for example, mentions that the objection of sacrificing goats at a major reconstructed sacrifice was raised with reference to “the spirit of a nation dedicated to ahimsa.”

vehemence. That decision sacrifices advantages of systematic ethnographic competency about communities, cultural practices, and particular histories of a single group. In the end, the sacrifice of community specifics has allowed me to say something more general about Ahmedabad and central Gujarat, and the emerging relationship between communities, than if I had concentrated on a specific group or caste. Being an outsider to the country and its peoples, I had the unique opportunity to cross section communities and individuals who would often not interact at all.

I also decided, then, to live in diverse neighborhoods and during the entire language study and field research I switched localities and neighborhoods five times. Although I managed to live in different localities in the west and the east of the city, I was not able to find a place within the old historical city wall due to the onset of pogrom violence. I did not plan initially to focus mainly on individuals belonging to the category “Hindus,” even if from diverse class and caste backgrounds. This decision was made while writing up as it became clear to me that the real questions lay not with the often defensive attitudes of the minority Muslims in Ahmedabad, nor with orthodox Islam, such a preferred topic these days.

Minority groups often hide behind defiant postures especially when most vulnerable. The real question became this entity called “the majority,” which was constantly invoked in Gujarat. How was it possible that the myriad organizations speaking in the name of the “Hindu” (that is, the majority), which played out their strengths unhindered by state government, state police, and even the state’s vernacular media, nonetheless claimed “vulnerability”?

This dissertation understands field research as based on intimate encounters with a place, with people, and with events, which have to be worked through. It is in the concrete encounter that data in form of subjective experiences are won. Reflexivity here means that in objectifying experience insights are won in a process

that is never quite complete. In many ways, I need the reader to finish the project. To the extent that an anthropologist is able to invest and share the meaning of his unique encounters, I see a significant distinction to the activities of spies, government agents, tourists, or journalists.

Instead of a detailed account of a specific groups, their pasts and presents, I will begin in chapter two with an account of violence which shatters all experience of neighborhood, locality, and community while simultaneously creating the “Hindu” and its extension, the Muslim. In the consequent chapters, I will then proceed to analyze the media depictions accompanying that transformation. In chapters 4-8, I will focus more closely on five individuals in whose statements and lives I will try to identify those aspects important to understand Hindutva, ahimsa, and the meaning of vegetarianism. While doing so, I will also try to weave in some insights about the ethnographic site--the city of Ahmedabad--in general.

In contrast to each other the five personages--two women and three men-- are positioned to Hindutva in different ways. The two women, Payal and Sejal, are members of high castes: one a Maharashtrian Brahman born and raised in Gujarat and belonging to the lower middle class; the other a Jain, relatively wealthy and upper middle class. In both of their lives, the question of meat eating and vegetarianism are importantly related to caste and gender impacting directly on their relations to the institution of marriage and sexuality. Two men, Bharat and Pratab, are former peasants with strong ties to their rural origin. They still regularly return to their respective villages and Bharat even holds a certain amount of political authority in the village. Classified as OBC (other backward classes) and calling themselves Rajput, both aspire to academic positions in the city. Influenced strongly by Hindutva ideology and standing right at the cusp of the promise of urban lower middle class,

they imagine a bright future for themselves. It is in persons like Bharat and Pratab that one will find the most astonishing absence of any cynicism, depression, or pessimism.

Finally, Ranjibhai is a member of a lower caste, an ex-Untouchable group, but has successfully risen to the urban middle class. Ranjit is also tied intimately to his home village near Ahmedabad where he commands much respect amongst his caste peers, but where he cautiously has to stay clear of confrontation with members of other local castes considered “higher.” However part of an increasingly financially secure middle class, Ranjit seems lonely in the midst of urban groups who understand little about his plight, and his own caste brethren whose abject destitution he sees all too clearly.

In chapter nine I have found it necessary to elucidate the nature of animal activism and ahimsa in politics, including Chief Minister Narendra Modi’s instrumentalization of ahimsa and the cow slaughter issue.

#### 0.1.6 Spelling, language, and English words

Some comments are necessary about the spelling of English words, which have become Gujarati idioms, or shifted semantically in the context of use in Gujarati. It will become sufficiently clear that to understand utterances in urban Ahmedabad, one needs English as much as Gujarati, even if Gujarati is more important for understanding what is being communicated. Hindi, too, plays a much larger role than just being an alternative language close in content and form to Gujarati. The use of English terms is an important aspect of this work compelled by the field experience itself. Its use can reveal interesting insights as for example the use of English words shadowing Gujarati meanings and thus inflecting Gujarati terms.

The largest problem in learning how to read Gujarati were not Gujarati words written in Gujarati, a script derived from *devanagari*, but English words written in Gujarati script. In some way, the same holds true for semantics. It is in the idiomatic

use of English words that ambiguities between the two languages become most manifest. This holds true particularly for those users of English expressions, who could not by any standard be considered competent in English.

The English language is used in many interesting ways and I have tried to keep the creativity and originality of this use alive as much as possible in my account. Compromises had to be made, however. In cases where the English word would be rendered completely unrecognizable, I have kept the proper English spelling for the sake of the reader. In some cases I have kept the Gujarati spelling or pronunciation transcribed into English letters, as e.g. “*chalenj*” or “*allagi*” instead of “challenge” and “allergy” to make sure the reader knows of the difference.

The indication of semantic differences between English words used as Gujarati terms is tricky, however, because semantics in these cases can shift and change more easily than, say, in a Gujarati word. The reason is simple: words like *personaliti*, *allagi*, *chalenj* do not exist in Gujarati dictionaries but homophones exist in English, from which, one might say, they formerly derived. With growing competence in standardized English the idiomatic meanings might get lost. In ten years Bharat might mean something very different when he speaks of “*personaliti*” or “*allagi*.” The meaning might also shift from person to person in relation to the social world the speaker in question inhabits, the newspapers he or she reads, the television and radio programs he or she consumes and so forth.

The citation of direct speech is given in quotation marks, the translation usually in brackets after them. I also often paraphrase and shorten what was told to me due to considerations of readability as well as length. Many interviews, or recorded discussions, were between 45-60 minutes and therefore could not be reasonably cited in full. My editing resulted in selective renderings of meaning, but the only alternative to this would have been to avoid any direct speech in the text. I chose to



offer as much direct speech as possible in order to indicate tenor, inflection of voice, repetitions, and in order to have the possibility to also indicate mimic, gesture, and body posture where relevant. My own additions, explanations or description, are in square brackets throughout the text.

#### 0.1.7 On the footnote

I reference many dictionaries throughout the text, and this may read as a bulky footnote apparatus. In addition to the depth it lends to the narrative in the text, this referencing also provides some insight about the process of thought and reflection that often precedes or accompanies some of the interpretations expressed. I have in mind particularly those readers familiar with other North Indian languages but not with Gujarati. They might be able to ascertain parallels or differences with the language in their field site, as I always like to do, when I read about other areas in India.

I also use the footnotes to make explicit all the nuances and semantic shifts that I found interesting in the terms that are significant for this work. The difference that language carries is often eviscerated in translation. This, of course, is especially important in those cases where there are translations into more widely trafficked languages, like Hindi or English. But even in the case of Gujarati, the *shuddh Gujarati* (pure Gujarati) is already eviscerating the “typical Gujarati” of the Bohri, Parsi, Chamar, Surti, respectively. The more idiomatic the language is, expressive of a regional dialect in geographical space (Saurashtra, North Gujarat, South Gujarat, Kutchh), or local dialect expressive of social space (the tongue of the Chamar, Bhangi, Vankar, or the Muslim), the more it is effaced in *shuddh Gujarati* (pure Gujarati). The Gujarati dictionary only contributes to the process of obliteration. In the face of the fact that only a very few dictionaries of local dialects exist, I have to make do without them.

I hope the reader will understand that my interpretations and translation are not self-serving compromises but informed ones, informed by fieldwork, a set of concrete experiences of encounter and trial and error. The footnotes are part of a conscious methodology: to take language and how it expresses seriously. In some cases they replace ethnographic anecdotes, which would be too lengthy or cumbersome to include. The dictionary only became an important tool when interpreting what was said and writing up my dissertation. It would be indeed a poor guide in searching for topics in the field.

I mostly proceeded from anecdotes, encounters, and observations (in memory, field notes, and tapes) to a reflection on terminology that seemed important through the use of a diverse range of new and old dictionaries that I have collected over the years. Dictionaries as well as the differences between them, proved to be valuable for interpreting ethnographic facts and experiences. It should be understood that many times words used on the street in Gujarat do not appear in any Gujarati dictionary due to their origin, newness, distribution of use, or English equivalent (like *personaliti*, or *entri*).

## 0.2 The city and its bridges

What is a bridge? At first, this question seems simple. Bridges are ingenious structures that allow passage over and above an obstacle, a gorge or a river. Bridges are said to unite separate spaces. In the notoriously congested inner cities of Bombay and Surat many overpasses function as traffic bridges to allow passage over and above busy intersections. Indians call these “flyovers,” as if to suggest a meaningless space in-between that must be quickly overcome. In Ahmedabad there are seven bridges over the Sabarmati River connecting the East with the West. Ostensibly, they unite two opposing river shores and expedite travel between them. But since for most of the year the riverbed is dry, they have lost some of their purpose and merely unite two

sides of a large ditch or a ravine. There are also bridges that pass beneath obstacles, what we might define as an underpass but what residents call an “underbridge.” In the public imaginary, these bridges have very little to do with uniting two spaces, two halves of a city, two shores of a river, East and West. Rather, the bridges that go over the ravines seem to mark a horizontal separation of residents, one Hindu-dominated the other Muslim, while the bridges that go under seem to mark a vertical separation between classes, as it is the poor that live underneath. Residents in East and West Ahmedabad increasingly experience and understand themselves as separate moieties.

Of the seven bridges in Ahmedabad, bridge number seven, Chimanbhai Bridge, was inaugurated in 1994, and the city widened many of the old ones in 2000. A first glance suggests these bridges link temporalities; they separate a new city from the historical city, whose gates are still preserved while the old wall has metamorphosed into a ring road. But a closer look suggests they separate classes: bourgeois areas in the West like Ambawadi, Naranpura, and Navrangpura, from working-class areas in the East like Bapunagar, Chamanpura, and Gomtipur, situated close to former textile mill factories beyond the old city wall. On the surface, they link a series of dichotomies: rich and poor, new and old, functioning facilities and neglected facilities, spacious and overcrowded, clean and dirty, Hindu and Muslim, safe and violent. Even the supervision of police stations was divided between East and West divisions in 1971, after the 1969 communal catastrophe. Though physically uniting the city, these bridges have become part of the experience of division, inequality, and separation that characterizes the city of Ahmedabad. Nothing expresses that better than the attempt of the Mc Donald’s Corporation to organize a “Human chain” between the West city and the East, which it announced and planned for March 2002, but never realized due to the beginning of the pogrom.

All but the oldest bridge over the Sabarmati, Ellis Bridge built in 1870, are named after modern Indian leaders, most of whom were proponents of national unity. From the south one can cross Sardar and Chimanbhai Bridge further up Nehru Bridge, then Ellis Bridge in the very center, or Gandhi Bridge to the north followed by Subhash and Indira. Sardar Vallabhai Patel dissolved the princely states (independent kingdoms) into the Indian union, Gandhi united the Indian people against the colonial oppressor, and Nehru united all Indians under one flag as the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

Today, the experience of the city is largely of division, which contradicts the unity for which the bridges were named. And much as the seven bridges divide the two halves of the city, Gujaratis are divided over the legacy of their national leaders. Only the memory of Sadar Vallabhai Patel seems to have escaped this ambivalence; most residents still hold him in high esteem.<sup>20</sup>

The city bridges have been widened frequently to facilitate traffic. In 2000 Ellis Bridge became Vivekanand Bridge, in the context of the contemporary Vedic revival, named after one of the heroes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindu revival. The old Ellis Bridge, the only one built by the British, is neither simply renamed nor demolished but added onto. At the West end of the bridge a large statue of Vivekanand now stands opposite the Ahmedabad town hall. The new structure is built “around” the old in such a manner that what was once the main causeway is now a thin-looking, unused,

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<sup>20</sup>The battles over the legacy of the national ancestry are interesting and at times confusing. Many people in Gujarat hold Mahatma Gandhi responsible for Partition and call Jawaharlal Nehru the first “pseudo-secularist.” Many Dalits focus on the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar, as the Mahatma had insisted that there was merit to the “caste system” (*varnavyavastha*), while opposing “untouchability” (Jaffrelot 2003). Subhash Chandra Bose’s militant role in the freedom struggle, his enigmatic exile in Malaysia, and the fact that his death in Taiwan is surrounded by so much mystery, makes him attractive to young Gujaratis. He is always depicted in his army suit and obviously represents a martial tradition of colonial resistance, like Bhagat Singh, in symbolic opposition to Mahatma Gandhi’s all too-large stature. Indira Gandhi, who suspended democracy for nearly two years during Emergency, is believed to have begun religious vote bank politics continuing her father’s “pseudo-secularism.” She is often respected for her *shakti* (power).

empty middle-strip flanked by two large new roads wide enough for white Tata Sumo Jeeps, several trucks, and buses. Old Ellis is literally engulfed by Vivekananda.<sup>21</sup>

The old city, surrounded by a road, which used to be the historical wall (demolished in 1925), is located on the East side of the Sabarmati River. Even in the absence of a visible wall, it is clear that one is either “inside” or “outside” of the wall. When speaking English, the historical city is often referenced as “the walled city.” The famous Sabarmati Ashram founded in 1917 by Mahatma Gandhi, lies outside the old city across the river, as does the older Satyagraha Ashram that he founded in the village of Kochrab in 1915. Both are now both securely within the city limits of West Ahmedabad, paying witness to the immense expansion of the city especially on the West banks of the river. As a Mr. Patel put it 2002, when talking to me, “where Gandhi is there is peace.”

Areas in the far West like Vastrapur, Satellite, and Memnagar have a distinctively different feel, with large, broad roads, high-rise apartment buildings, cleaner air, and marked by the complete absence of any *azan* noises (the call to Muslim prayer from mosques). A few Muslim middle-class families do live in these areas, but the Muslim community as such is hardly visible and as I try to maintain in chapter eight, only where communities becomes visible as a collective, does tension smolder. Paradoxically, fear seems much higher, where there is no visibility of the minority community.

Beyond invisible walls and a dried-out riverbed, on the other side in the far East, the sky is adorned with many chimneys, signifying its former status as the “Manchester of India.” Most of those textile mills are closed today, but their former employees, now in constant search for jobs, remain in the East, living in the

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<sup>21</sup>Vivekananda was an important religious reformist and ascetic saint of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who attended the first Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and introduced the West to what he understood to be “Hinduism,” the Mother of all religions. Vivekananda was from Bengal but traveled widely, including to Gujarat.

shantytowns that dominate large parts of this area of the city. Many middle-class Ahmedabadis who live in the west have not visited the industrial areas for years and have no plans to do so. They fear not only poor Muslims but also want to avoid encountering the large Dalit population that lives there. Living among the Dalits and Muslims are a few Christians, most of whom are former Dalits themselves.

In the East, the dust accumulates exponentially, but one often has the impression not of an old city but of one only half-finished, as if suddenly interrupted in its development. The bridges also link two different micro-climates. In the summer, the heat and humidity in the East are unbearable. In the winter, the lack of heat prevents the thick air from rising and dissipating. The usual cool air of the evening does not comfort much as the air turns thick and grey. The illegally utilized but comparatively cheap “kerosene,” burning in the motors of many rickshaws, two- and three-wheelers, sting the eyes and make you squinch. I often stop my scooter just to clean off my eyeglasses. This grey smog not only lays itself on blankets clothes, eyeglasses, and faces, but more seriously penetrates the markets, its fruits and vegetables, which need more and longer washing in a part of the city that lacks sufficient water for its residents.

I grew up in the 1980s in Berlin, a city polluted through coal-burning heat-ovens in private homes, and experienced frequent smog alarms in the winter. Still, the smog of Ahmedabad tests the limits of my imagination especially as no “alarm” is ever called. In the dim light of the streetlights at night, the beams of oncoming traffic are reflected and broken in the thick air. In places like Gita Mandir Road and Behrampura, which I passed nearly everyday in the later half of my field research, it is very difficult to see at night.

In the West, the city is expanding into the surrounding areas with new high-rises and multi-complexes. This side of the city seems much better planned and has

large green areas, like the public parks around Gujarat University that I frequent. The newer the areas the more sophisticated and complete they also appear; the older the areas the more decrepit and incomplete. At the far west of the city's border and in its adjacent districts, one finds the modern and broad Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Highway, what is clearly the result of immense recent progress in the New Jersification of Gujarat.

Next to a series of fancy restaurants and a monumental new Swaminarayan Temple, flanked by sports clubs with names like Karnavati Club (Karnavati is the unofficial "Hindu name" of the city) and Rajpath Club, whose life membership cost up to a million Rupees (\$25,000), shopping and entertainment malls have appeared. "Fun Republic"--what people call a "multiplex"--is painted in bright yellow, red, green, and blue. There are airport-style security checks at the entrances, largely to prevent any undesirables from entering. Uniformed guards manage traffic and even search with mirrors for bombs under two-wheelers. There are the usual cinemas, coffee shops, restaurants, and, of course, a myriad of shops. Once past the security checks, the malls allow for long leisurely strolls in air-conditioned spaces and unaccustomed rides up and down the escalators.

In the districts of Satellite and Vastrapur and parts of Memnagar, the traffic islands are painted yellow & black as are the side curbs and even sport flowers at times. Some squares have water fountains and police booths to protect the officers from the blazing sun. The fancy "supermarkets" that usually have a Ganesh statue in front of the entrance have a wide range of food items that cost up to three times as much as anywhere else.

#### 0.2.1 Bridges that keep apart

We have to come back to the initial question, what is a bridge for?

To build a bridge is to do something very useful in a similar way dams are useful for collecting water and producing electricity and roads to facilitate traffic. There are those, however, who say that dams can drain out more water than provide. In any “Nehruvian” version of modernity, in which we all participate in more than we usually allow ourselves to admit, few reasons can be convincingly made not to build bridges. But could it be that a bridge actually separates more than it unites?

In “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” Heidegger complicates things by claiming that it is only with the *Brücke* (bridge) that the space around it actually emerges.<sup>22</sup> By building a bridge one does not connect formerly separate spaces, rather one creates a place (*Ort*), divided by a bridge. There might have been many locations (*Stellen*) along the river shore before, where one could or could not have erected something, but only through the bridge does a place (*Ort*) emerge, and only where there is a place is there such a thing as “space” (*Raum*).

For Heidegger bridges create the space around them and not vice versa. They do not unify space but rather bring about a place divided by a bridge. There is no “space” in and of itself prior to the bridge and the specific place (*Ort*) the bridge creates.<sup>23</sup> Once the bridge exists, a place emerges, in which all objects and things are defined by their relation to it, as well as to each other, and to the human beings (*Menschen*) putting them to use. Why does a bridge not unite unambiguously despite connecting two separate shores, fulfilling the promise of “connectivity” that lies at the heart of the promise of “modernity” as well as of the more recent version of it, “globalization”?

Heidegger might answer that a bridge creates people who live closer to it, and people who live further away from it, as well as the distance (*Abstand*) between them. Similarly, it creates things and objects that are closer and further away from it, as well

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1954.

<sup>23</sup>Heidegger is defying the ontological priority of *Raum* (space) outside of the experience of *Ort* (place).



as the distance between them. One might add that a bridge creates people who use the bridge to cross and people who never use it, or only sleep under it, and the separation between them. It creates people who barely go to the other side, but nonetheless think about what the other side might be like; or it creates those who *do* regularly cross over but dislike what they see, etc. as well as the differences between all of these and more. A bridge allows escape from a place as much as it allows access to it.

To understand bridges as simply uniting places by manipulating an objective space is to imagine a world without relation between thing and thing, objects and human beings. It is, in fact, to imagine a world that does not exist. Bridges do not simply unify, in fact in many ways one can say they do the opposite by exacerbating existing separation and even creating new differences. Bridges create a place, by bringing a surrounding area in relation to its function: overcoming physical or geographical distance.

The problem of division that a bridge is supposed to solve comes onto its own once people are related to each other through the very bridge that was supposed to bridge physical division. Now, the bridge becomes complicit in the division of the place it has helped to define. The bridge is not the “cause” of social division, but part of it through exacerbation by organizing new forms of access and escape that take diverse form in schismogenesis, contagion, estrangement, displacement, or projection.

What Heidegger means to draw attention to, is that through the bridge, the question of closeness (*Nähe*) and remoteness (*Ferne*) suddenly becomes merely a question of the physical space, the space in between two things (*Zwischenraum*). Separation appears like something that can be “bridged” in the sense of the Latin “*spatium*,” which calls for the ingenuity of the engineer and the skill of the construction worker. Separation understood as “*spatium*,” can be overcome by building bridges or, by extension, constructing roads, railways, airports and all other

devices that accelerate time, minimize physical distance, and promise solution to physical separation.

Not incidentally, middle class residents in West-Ahmedabad will often claim that Muslims only live on the other side of the river. They live “inside” (*under ma*), that means to say, within the old city, which is on the East side of the river. Sometimes people will use the hybrid expression “*inside area ma*” or the more proper “*juna shaher ma*” (in the old city). *Himsa* (violence) is happening “there” and the new Mc Donald’s is opening “here.” Muslims and Dalit are living “there” and we are living here. Killings are “there” and Gandhi’s ashram of non-violence is “here.” These references in gesture and speech execute much more a desired result, a stubborn exorcism of sorts, then describing an empirical fact. Not only do members of all communities live on both side of the river, as well as inside and outside the historical old city, but liquor, meat, communal violence, prostitution, or crime, are available everywhere in Ahmedabad. Not only is Maninagar a bourgeois area in the Eastern city, overcrowded ghettos without poor access to water can also be found in the areas of West Ahmedabad.

Instead of being a solution to the problem of separation, Ahmedabad’s bridges have become its very form, the language of division when residents say, *bija baju ma* (on the other side), or make a typical hand gesture indicating “on the other side of the river.” The more the city of Ahmedabad has built bridges, the more unequal it has become, so much so, that those divisions that the bridge never overcame have now become expressed through the division of the city through bridges. The bridges have become the language of its own failure. In this way, the bridges are part of the experience of inequality in Ahmedabad.

This fact is brought home by the way the bridges are used, not only as means to bridge space, but as means to remain invisible when one is in full view. The place

on the bridge, an in-between space, is the location where lovers meet at night, or couples promenade side by side, Hindu or Muslim, Dalit or Jain, man or woman, enjoying the rare cool breeze, away from the city body and the logic of “community.” It is where Bharat takes my hand imagining his marriage to Renjenben, and where a Rumana can meet her Pravin. Promenading on top of a bridge strangely feels as if one is at the city’s margin, although the bridges are physically in the city’s very center. The riverbed below Nehru, Ellis, or Gandhi-bridge is used for drying clothes, committing murders, playing large cricket matches, and the forbidden love between men (or between women?), and members of opposed communities or castes. In full view of the gaze one can remain invisible as here, finally, one is in-between the city, or better on its very surface, a dried out surface.

Later in 2002, Narendra Modi released the waters of the Narmada, the “Mother of all rivers,” timely for his 2002 election campaign, after he had promised its waters to all Gujaratis. The Sabarmati in Ahmedabad suddenly carried water again as if to wash away the blood and gore of the violence. But the spectacle of water in the Sabarmati also brought back what the city had just tried to leave behind. On several occasions dead bodies were found swimming in the river, washed out from somewhere, like the skeletons found in wells, gutters, and in road ditches, in the weeks after the violence.<sup>24</sup> The specter of bodies swimming in the river signified only one recent event. State officials hurried giving the assurance that these were “merely” ghetto dwellers that probably couldn’t swim and lived too close to the dry river bed in anyway illegal quarters. They cannot have been late victims of the pogrom, it was claimed.

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<sup>24</sup>“2 skeletons found in Rakhial sewer,” Times of India, August 20, 2002; “Recovery of more skeletons unlikely,” Express News Service, August 20, 2002; “Skeletons found from sewer identified,” Times of India, August 21, 2002; “Skeletons raise stink, put cops in scavenging mode,” Times of India, August 22, 2002.

Anonymous young men drowned by the sudden release of water from an artificial dam for the sake of an election, were somewhat less serious than men chopped to pieces by a wave of “Hindu anger,” released by the very same government. In both cases, the indifference toward life for the sake of political gain is chilling to the bone. I stopped my vehicle twice when crossing the bridge and perceiving a crowd gazing at a floating corpse from a bridge. In both cases the corpses were of young dead men, not older than 25 years of age. The two incidences in question were not even reported in any paper. But the instinct to suspect the corpses being victims of the recent wave of violence, and not a wave of water, was somewhat to the point. Both had been victims of a sudden wave, and each time, the wave had been set off by the Modi government.

## Chapter 1.0 Sacrifice

### 1.1 Vedic sacrifice

In the Vedic sacrifice, an animal was killed in place of the sacrificer. The animal was the interface between the sacrificer and the deity. At one specific moment in the ritual, the animal is as much the substitute for the sacrificer as a substitute for the deity addressed (Smith and Doniger 1989, Hubert and Mauss 1964[1914], Gonda 1983). It is in the victim that deity and worshippers coalesce (Robertson Smith 1889, Thite 1970).<sup>25</sup> As Smith and Doniger (1989) have it, every sacrifice is always three acts at once: a suicide, a deicide, as well as an animal murder. Madeleine Biardeau (1976, 1989:31) defined ahimsa as the “absence of the desire to kill,” implying that Vedic sacrifice always involved the *desire* to kill. Freud, too, speaking of “*ambivalente Gefühlseinstellungen*,” points to the ambivalence of killing and ingestion at the core of primal sacrifice (1995 [1912/13]). What happened in ahimsa to this ambivalence in the desire to kill?

What is the nature of nonviolence? The origin of ancient ahimsa—defined variously as nonviolence, non-injury, non-desire to do harm, harmlessness--emerges initially not in post-Vedic times with the formulations of the Upanishads and the Shramanic critique of sacrificial violence, as one would expect, but derives out of the violence of the Vedic sacrifice itself. The ritualists already employed an early version of ahimsa (*ahimsayai*) as an appeasement technology, a magical ahimsa that tries to control violence ritually since the death of a victim (vegetable or animal) necessarily involves impurity (Schmidt 1968:648-649, Gonda 1959:115-116). A look back to ancient times reveals not ethical considerations but fear of contamination with

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<sup>25</sup>Julius Schwab (1886: XIX-XX) already considers interpretation of ancient animal sacrifice as atmanishkraya, as *Loskauf* (pay-off) and *Lösegeld* (ransom money), that is, the sacrificer (*Opferer*) pays his own self off with the blood of an animal substitute, in order to escape an early, premature death in the face of demanding divinities.

violence at the center of the emergence of ahimsa in the Vedic sacrificial complex. Ahimsa is, in this way, linked to notions of purity and pollution at the heart of Brahmanical conceptions of caste. Ahimsa, as explicated by an entire generation of interpreters (see Schmidt 1968, Alsdorf 1962, Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, Heesterman 1984) interestingly harks back to a time *before* the ascetic ethicization of the concept that attempts to protect life for life's sake. Alsdorf (1962) also discusses how ahimsa is linked, or rather *not* linked, to vegetarianism, which emerged much later and has today become the concrete *practice* of ahimsa, especially in Gujarat.

My own ethnographic material reveals the intricate ways in which ahimsa in Gujarat today has taken on new meanings, how, in other words, it has come to be associated with vegetarianism, prohibition of animal and cow slaughter, and Hindu identity, all four of which were initially not configured in unity by the ancient concept. Most significant is the relation of ahimsa to identifications allowing for the emergence of disgust, vulnerability, and anger, three affective conditions essential for the political ideology of Hindutva. If disgust is understood as a visceral reaction protective of the person in question, anger is understood as a reaction to perceived vulnerability. Anger and disgust appear not only in the mobilization for communal violence but are also necessary affective states for the upward mobility of lower caste groups in becoming "Hindu," as well as for protecting and policing existing community boundaries.

What is most significant in these respective transformations of ahimsa from ancient to modern is the status of the victim. Who becomes the object of ahimsa?

#### 1.1.1 Some preliminary remarks

There is an ongoing debate on the origin of ahimsa and vegetarianism among scholars, in which what is most contradictory to explain is how a Vedic society obsessed with a *Realpolitik* of cattle raiding, war, and blood sacrifice, created its opposite in the equally radical formulations of the dharma scriptures obsessed with an

ethical ahimsa, non-injury, and vegetarianism (Alsdorf 1962, Schmidt 1968, Dumont 1980, Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, Biardeau 1989, Heesterman 1984, 1985, 1993, Smith 1990, Smith and Doniger 1989, Vidal et. al. 2003).

Understanding ancient Vedic sacrifice requires an interpretation of the unique Vedic literature, its individual components and their complex relation to each other. Whereas in an earlier textual stratum Vedic sacrifice appears to have been a festival full of inebriated participants eating beef, feeling a glimpse of immortality in the presence of Gods that descended to the sacrificial field and attended the feast (Farquhar 1904[1993]: 21, Basham 1954:239), the ritual's complexity grew with the rising influence of a priestly class. One explanation for this shift is that the warring tribes settled and actual conflict between groups subsided. What instead became more important was establishing a permanent relation of dominance over a surrounding world that seemed ever encroaching.

Under these conditions Brahmins sought a novel kind of control over the agonistic principles contained within the sacrificial ritual. As Farquhar put it, "While, in the times of the Rigveda, men sought to win the regard of the gods, or to persuade them to give their help by sacrifice, hymn and prayer, in this new period the sacrifice is regarded as a mysterious operation which, if faithfully carried out, will irresistibly compel the gods" (1904[1993]:30).<sup>26</sup> The elaborate and highly formalized new version of sacrifice compelled kings to obey and maintained the Gods through its execution. The Brahman sacrificers could spell catastrophe for the patrons of sacrifice (sacrifiers) by the slightest variation of the ritual operations, making the sacrifice an instrument of their own power (Basham 1954:241).

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<sup>26</sup>The usage of the term "god" is confusing here even if replaced with *devata*, because it is nearly impossible to resist reading them in light of the complex later developments. Suffice it to say that these "gods" were a far cry from the later Hindu divinities, which enter into what one calls "Hinduism," for better or worse. The main difference consists in the emergence of a sacerdotal class and the conception of an "Absolute" (Biardeau 1989:16-32).

This period is known through the Brahmana literature, a compilation of oral traditions from the several schools specializing in learning and reciting the Veda of the time. The Brahmanas added additional information to the Veda itself, details regarding sacrificial procedures, meaning and pronunciation of acts and utterances. Having become part of the Veda, these texts are, according to Farquhar, “the most absurd and uninteresting prose literature in all the world” (1904[1993]: 33). Be it as it may, this complex literature has nonetheless offered to Indologists a unique opportunity to understand the complicated transformations of ritual acts that were performed long ago, and it is here, as we shall see below, that the oldest versions of the word *ahimsa* appear for the first time.<sup>27</sup>

I will now begin to trace six different moments in the complex transformation of the concept of *ahimsa* to elucidate these tensions and transformations.

## 1.2 Transformations of sacrifice, I-VI

### 1.2.1 I. Agonistic phase: circulation of death

The Indologist J.C. Heesterman distinguishes two significant consecutive phases in ancient Vedic sacrifice. They are similar but not completely akin to what Basham and Farquhar have suggested above. The earliest phase reveals a sacrifice as a “play,” a sort of sacrificial contest, and a later ritualized sacrifice, which is the classical system elaborated in the Brahmanas. Most Indologists deal with the later one

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<sup>27</sup> In order to mark the defining line between Abrahamic and Brahmanic sacrifice, respectively, I would suggest one needs to take seriously the essentially evolutionist perspective of William Robertson Smith and Sigmund Freud. It is one thing to claim comparison is impossible but quite another to situate distinctive developments in time. The problem thus seems to me to be one of chronology, not of translatability between the ancient Semites and the early Aryans. Robertson Smith’s stress on commensality and the ingestion of the totem could, if at all, only be found in an early period; Freud’s elaborations on the *Urhorde* even earlier. What seems certain, however, is that with the *Achsenzeit*, the South Asian transformation of sacrifice took an own distinctive turn, which is palpable until today.



because of the large ancient corpus of text available. Heesterman identifies and distinguishes both phases sharply from one another (1993, 1985: 81pp. and 95pp).

In the earlier dualistic form of ancient Vedic ritual, the agonistic principle of sacrifice was acted out between two complementary rivals, a sacrificer (*yajamana*) and a guest, who also served the function of the officiant of the sacrifice, a guest-sacrificer (Brahman). This guest-sacrificer was made to ingest the dead self of the sacrificer through gifts and food (*dakshina* and remains of the offerings), thus renewing the life of the sacrificer, who in turn became the pure Brahman: “the *dikshita* patron sheds his death impurity and is reborn a pure brahman. The brahman on the other hand takes over the burden of death” (Heesterman 1985:28).

This ingestion was compulsory as was attendance at the sacrifice itself, once invited. As Heesterman has described in extensive detail (1964, 1985, 1993), the death of the other, symbolized by the offering, was only accepted to be ingested because, following the principle of reciprocity, one could renew one’s own life though reversing the “patron-brahmin pair,” offering one’s own impurity (one’s own dead self) to be ingested preferably at an even greater sacrifice. The tense anxiety of this dualist form of competitive sacrifice lay in whether the ante could be raised, whether one was able to patronize an even greater sacrifice with reversed roles the next time.

Note that there is no mention of ahimsa on this level, because the impurity of violence, which is death, is managed through the reciprocal exchange of death. The death produced and ingested in the ritual will be produced again tomorrow and ingested by someone else. Death circulates and creates an early community. In this earlier system through the exchange of purity and pollution, two opposing groups cooperated in a life-affirming ritual. Significantly, in a community that circulates death and life, non-violence is not needed. Life means eating someone else’s death.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Significantly, Heesterman points out that these exchanges were probably between affines; the relation between patron and Brahmin, *kshatra* and *brahman*, were connubial (1985:28). That would make much

In the later classical system, however, the ritual itself becomes the domain of absolute purity and the rival is rigorously excluded from the ritual (Heesterman 1985:27-29). The earlier dualist sacrifice is replaced with a monist version, individualizing and formalizing the sacrificial procedure. As we shall see below, it is with this replacement that the earliest form of ahimsa makes its entry as a form of magical protection of the sacrificer from the reciprocal effects of the violence meted out.

This later development of elaborate ritual sacrifice, with its complicated liturgical technical procedures, de-socialized the sacrifice into an atomistic and private exercise of the sacrificer dependent on members of a specialized priestly class (sacrificers). Previously, it had been a public contest between two parties full of ambivalence, exchange, and uncertainty in its agonistic form (1993: 39pp., 53, 1985:81pp.).<sup>29</sup> Later, the reciprocity of ingestion is replaced by a division of symbolic labor.

Most importantly, however, Heesterman points out how this process of “individualization” (1985:35), which transformed the earlier contest into a ritual proper, also transformed the field of social relations associated with it. The reciprocal system of mutual prestation, reversal of roles, and especially the circulation of evil and impurity, became unhinged. The ritual becomes “predominantly governed by functional specializations,” hierarchy becomes permanently settled, and disposal of impurity becomes a hereditary specialty inaugurating those principles that govern the caste system (35). It is probable that this fundamental change in ritual was predicated

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sense since affinal relations are often transformed agonistic relations of war and competition (Lévi-Strauss 1969[1949]).

<sup>29</sup>Heesterman (1993:35) speculates that initially the presence of the Gods was through “human ‘doubles’” of the officiating priests invited by the patron who received the *dakshina*. The *dakshina* together with the food “are the sacrificer’s dead self, which he disposes of by burdening his guests with it” (37). For Heesterman sacrifice manipulates the enigma of life and death and offers no resolution (36), as the sacrificer endeavors to unload the burden of death onto his guests by having them eat his food. In the context of sacrifice the relation between guest and host party is a tense one (37).

on simultaneous transformations of social organization, but this question takes my inquiry too far astray.<sup>30</sup>

Once the opposing complementarity between yajamana (sacrifier, patron) and Brahman (sacrificer, officiant) disappears, and both become fused into one single unity in the classical ritual, the legendary precaution of the Brahman to accept the gift, especially food, comes into its own.<sup>31</sup> The agonism between patron and sacrificer was resolved at the price of altering the relation between the brahman and non-brahman worlds, since any equal “revanche” is now ruled out (Heesterman 1985:36-37).

### 1.2.2 II. The killing that is no killing

According to the Indologist Hanns Peter Schmidt (1968), the origin of ahimsa is to be found neither in some conjectural past of “pre-Aryan civilization” of which we know little and for which there is only scant evidence, nor in sectarian opposition to Brahmanic dominance.<sup>32</sup> Following up insights of Ludwig Alsdorf (1962) and discarding others, Schmidt attempts to unveil one of the most unresolved paradoxes of Brahmanic tradition. He returns to the very center of the production of violence in the

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<sup>30</sup>Heesterman (1993:149) offers a fascinating and complicated speculation about the early sacrificial cult of the fire, where “the paradoxical qualities of the fire were molded into a pattern of cyclical alternating phases corresponding to the rhythm of the community. The sedentary life in the cultivating settlement was pitted against the opposite phase of the mobile, transhumant warrior-herdsman in the wild, the stable and permanent domestic hearth against the mobile and intermittently set up camp fire (...).”

<sup>31</sup>Mauss (1978[1950]:115) alluded to the fact that for the Brahman, as in so many other societies, the relation between giver and receiver is too close for comfort and although the gift has to be given, as well as received, it remains fraught with danger. Thus ironically despite the fact that the traditional Brahman lives off gifts, the highest Brahman is nonetheless one who does not accept gifts in theory (Heesterman 1985:37).

<sup>32</sup>Schmidt (1968) disagrees with Alsdorf’s (1962) contention that ahimsa and vegetarianism have their origins in the Indus civilization, but agrees that the emergence of the ascetic renouncer tradition (which implied an ethical ahimsa and later also strict vegetarianism) was an all-Indian movement, encompassing Brahmanism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Heesterman, too, argues for an orthogenetic development and dismisses the notion that “over clever Brahmins” outsmarted the heterodox sects in an “if-you-cannot-beat-them-join-them-move” (1984:121). Tähtinen (1976:131pp), who distinguishes a Vedic from an Ascetic conception of ahimsa, traces a possible pre-Aryan origin of the ascetic idea of ahimsa.

Vedic sacrificial complex and its elaboration in the Brahmana scriptures, where “we meet with the earliest occurrences of the word ahimsa” (Schmidt 1968:646).

Ahimsa was initially part of a magico-ritualistic complex, what he calls the “ritual ahimsa theory.” In the context of sacrifice, violence was taken extremely seriously because any injury automatically meant a reciprocal return of violence for the sacrificer in the “yonder world.”<sup>33</sup> At the same time, however, violence was absolutely necessary in order to wrench life away from death in this world. Thus a series of magical technologies were employed to “eliminate” all killing and injury in the sacrifice.

“They kill, in truth, this sacrifice when they perform it; and when they press out the King (Soma), then they kill him; and when they make an animal consent and cut it up, then they kill it; by pestle and mortar and by the two milestones they kill the haviryajna. After having killed the sacrifice he (the adharvyu) pours it which has become seed into the fire as its womb, for the womb of the sacrifice is, in truth, the fire; from that (the fire) it (the sacrifice) is reborn” (646).

The animal victim is reborn in the womb, which is the very sacrificial fire in which it was immolated as an offering. Substitution occurs on two levels, in action as well as in words. “In truth” the animal is substituted for the sacrificer, and “in truth” death is life (killing is rebirth). Words are substituted for other words as if to divert one’s attention away from the reality of the killing. The slaughterer is called ‘appeaser’ (*samitr*) and even if killing and dying is explicitly stated, as in the above, it is immediately denied: “Not to death, in truth, do they lead (the animal) which they lead to sacrifice” (1968:646). According to Schmidt there is a general tendency to

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<sup>33</sup>Schmidt (1968:648-49), like most authors, does not distinguish terminologically between sacrificer and sacrificer. That it is the sacrificer, which he often refers to when he uses the term sacrificer is evident when he says, “In a number of instances ahimsayai refers to the prevention of injury to the sacrificer, his progeny and cattle.” Or: “The sacrificer, being instrumental—though mostly through the agency of his priests—in every ritual act and therefore responsible, must be safeguarded against any conceivable retaliation.”

avoid the words “to kill” and “to die” in the context of Vedic sacrifice. For leading the animal to sacrifice and killing, the authors employ instead *a labhate* (he takes hold of) and *sam jnapayali* (he makes consent).<sup>34</sup>

An extreme prudence pervades the sacrifice and extends to all objects and materials involved. When the tree is felled which is to serve as the sacrificial post in the animal sacrifice “precautionary measures are taken to prevent it from being injured.” Schmidt continues citing and interpreting the ritual texts: “‘O plant, protect it’, he (the adharvyu) says in order to protect it. ‘O axe, do not injure it’ -- with these words he puts this (blade of darbha-grass) between it (the tree) and the thunderbolt-- the axe is, in truth, a thunderbolt—so that there be no injury” (1968: 647). But once the tree is appeased and felled, it, in turn, is likely to create more injury:

“The sacrificial post is in truth a thunderbolt; these worlds are afraid of it when it is being hurled down since being hurled down unappeased it is capable of injuring these worlds. When he says: ‘With your top do not injure the sky, with your middle (do not injure) the intermediate world, become unified with the earth, go to radiance’, he thus appeases it; thus appeased, it is hurled down so that it does not do injury to these worlds.”

Schmidt continues: after the animal victim is “appeased” (killed by suffocation),<sup>35</sup> the orifices of its body are sprinkled with water. “Burning pain hits the

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<sup>34</sup>With reference to H. Oertel (1942) Schmidt also mentions the euphemisms *a sthapayati* (to make stop) and *gamayati* (to make go). Thite (1970:155) also mentions the “euphemistic sophistication of the ‘killing’ element in the animal sacrifice.” It should be noted here that the usage of euphemisms in ancient times plays also a curious role in contemporary Gujarat. Through the use of these euphemisms, identifications with a Vedic past never risks embarrassment. In the contemporary “Vedic revival,” ancient cultural practices are easily reinterpreted and fail to shock or disturb the middle class vegetarian sensibility. Anachronistically, the practices of a distant past become continuous with the values of a present. The best example for this effacement of the past to construct a vegetarian “Hindu” present is the recent outrage around D.N. Jha’s “The Myth of the Holy Cow” described in chapter nine. Several examples are given by Alsdorf (1962) in the context of Schubring’s new edition of the translation of the Dasaveyaliya, an ancient Jaina text. Schubring’s translation of *mamsa* as meat and *maccecha* as fish prompted an Ahmedabadi merchant in 1932 to reject an entire delivery of translations from Germany (Alsdorf 1962:566-567).

<sup>35</sup>In Vedic sacrifice live animals generally seem to have been suffocated (Thite 1970:144, Smith and Doniger 1989:214-215, Schmidt 1968:647). It is interesting to note that suffocation, instead of cutting,

vital breaths of the animal being killed. When he says: ‘Do not injure its voice, do not injure its breath,’ he thus frees its vital breaths by water from burning pain. With the words: ‘Whatever of you is wounded, whatever of you is stopped (=killed), of that become purified, beautify yourself for the gods’, he has made unwounded whatever they have wounded by making it go (=by killing it), that he appeases.”

The rest of the water is poured to the earth and thus the burning pain has been transferred from the vital breaths of the animal to the water, and now the pain enters the earth: “When he says: Hail to the waters’, he thus appeases (them). They thus hit this (earth) appeased so that they do not do injury (to the earth).”

How does this magic technology ever heal? If Hegel was right to say that the word takes the place of the thing, one might simply argue that the actual killing is substituted by words misrepresenting and overwriting the acts. It is true that these oral incantations accompany the ritual acts without ever quite corresponding to them. The sacrificial animal was appeased by being told it would not be killed but only reborn as part of the animal herds of the Gods. The suffocated animal was sprinkled with water to undo the wound and purify it from the very violence it just has been subjected to. The felled tree is appeased by being told it was not injured by the axe that just felled it.

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is also performed in contemporary sacrifices even if animals are substituted for by rice-cakes (Staal 1983). Sometimes this form of killing is understood to be more humane, at other times it is expressed that suffocation allows the animal to lie still when being dissected which makes the collection of the blood to be ingested much easier. Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal (1976) describe for the Charan in Gujarat that in sacrifices the animals were cut by one single stroke, some times two, with the sword, the first performed by a Harijan, the second by a Rajput (1976:180). Cutting with one stroke is also reported by Briggs (1920:182). The injunction to make an animal “consent” before being killed and thus allowing the murder to become a proper sacrifice is also followed in more contemporary practices. Amongst Vagri in South India, for example, the animal is sprinkled with water not necessarily to wash away the pain but to initiate it’s shivering. The shiver is then read as an indication that the Goddess has given her approval for the sacrificial slaughter (Werth 1996:345pp). The exact same is reported by tribal Bhil in Enthoven (Vol. 1, 1922:166). Note that in the classic Vedic sacrifice the blood of the animal was given to evil beings, as it was considered their share. The offering was a form of exorcism (*utkara*), which resulted in being protected from these evil spirits (Thite 1970:155). I suspect in this fact lies the reason for contemporary stigmatizations of tribal and lower-caste practices, which (until recently at least) included ritual ingestion of blood. On urban forms of contemporary, vegetarian *utkar* see my descriptions in chapter eight.

As Heesterman (1984), following Schmidt, succinctly puts it, the “pivotal gap” caused by the immolation of the victim had to be undone. In the Brahmana texts “this or that is to be said or done *ahimsayai*,” (Heesterman 1984:121, Gonda 1959:115) that is to say, to avoid and undo the injury, to unwind the wound, and to fill the gap created.<sup>36</sup> Gonda stresses that the dative *ahimsayai* is used to express “for security’s sake,” recited by the officiating priest in order “to prevent injury to himself and the sacrificer” (1959:116).

A chain of words substitutes for the gap created by an act of killing. It seems essential, however, that the words do not quite signify the act’s reality: the taking of life or injury. The words substituting for the acts are euphemisms for the killing, but precisely as euphemisms they always have a logical connection to the act and are never completely disconnected from it. “Appeasing” and “quieting” are not unreasonably unrelated to “killing,” but at the same time they are also not quite “killing” itself. Likewise, the physical similarity between a thunderbolt and a tree, a thunderbolt and an axe, or an animal and a human, are always evident. The established equivalences are thus not nonsensical, as some authors have dismissingly suggested. They do not attempt to deny the act’s truth: the production of death (a kill). On the contrary, they show a sober acknowledgement of the fact of death but at the same time the wish to control its effects and avoid any negative consequences. Death of a victim, here, also means rebirth of the victim somewhere else and life for the sacrificer.

The careful deployment of words, then, is a linguistic technology that plays on differences and similarity in the act of substitution. The magical efficacy is that a chain of signifiers takes the place of the gap produced by the kill. It is the substituted words that wrench away the reality of death from the killing through the repetition of

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<sup>36</sup>Schmidt (1968:647) also mentions that in a parallel text *santyai* instead of *ahimsayai* is used. *Santi* means peace as in the contemporary Hindi “*shanti*.”

language.<sup>37</sup> Through wrenching away, step by step, from the act of cutting and killing, the reality of killing weakens, loosens itself, and becomes manageable. But the early ritualists were not naïve. Once released, the reality of killing does not completely disappear; it returns, looms large, and can attach itself again to a new object in the immediate vicinity. Thus, procedures are carefully repeated with other objects in the sacrifice, the tree and the pole, the axe, and the earth.

If one takes the chronology and content of these acts seriously, it seems as if the initial violence released must be prevented from circulating from the orifices of the victim, to the pole, to the water, to the earth. The possibility of violence appears in the tree, which is felled, the water used, and again to be absorbed by the earth. It is as if the repeated clause “in truth” is not trusted completely by the ritualists themselves and a possible displacement and reoccurrence of the contamination with violence looms large over the entire complex operation. There is an overly conscious acknowledgement of the danger that--despite all magic precaution, or as Schmidt says, despite the establishing of “magical equivalences” (killing is rebirth, axe is thunderbolt, tree is thunderbolt, injury is not injury)--killing is so powerful that its violence might still find the way back to seek revenge against the sacrificer. These healing technologies went so far as to render any sacrificial death a “ritual mistake” (ibid, a murder with serious consequences). Killing in sacrifice was conceived as no killing.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>We simply do not know if and what other performative bodily acts complemented to the spoken words in ancient Vedic sacrifice. For examples for some recent sacrificial practices in South Asia see Holmberg (1989) and Werth (1996); for recent reconstructions of ancient Vedic sacrifice, see Staal (1983); for a more detailed description of ancient Vedic animal sacrifice, see Schwab (1886).

<sup>38</sup>For references of ahimsa as used in the sense of non-injury to the sacrificer himself, see also Tähtinen (1976:2pp.). According to this author the Vedic conception of himsa is bracketed within the Vedic conception of ahimsa (p. 12). Like Alsdorf he mentions, for example, that in Manu, the himsa prescribed in the Vedas should be construed to mean ahimsa as they both produce good results (p.5). Although a comprehensive attempt and useful in many respects, this overly systematized work fails to distinguish between the earliest formulations of ahimsa and its later versions because it juxtaposes two definitions conceptually right from the beginning, while displacing the origin of the ascetic ideas of ahimsa into a pre-Aryan time.



Therefore, perhaps then one can say that Vedic sacrifice became a violence that did not speak its name but was far from denying its destructive effect. The ritualists tried to control and tame the power of death and life through complicated ritual elaborations. We find this fact even in the much later Manu law book where sacrificial meat is explicitly allowed, in contrast to the ascetic spirit of the time.<sup>39</sup>

In contradistinction to the axial departure of early Buddhist thought, Vedic ritualism, according to Heesterman, even when taking the decisive Upanishadic extensions into consideration, was never able to reconcile the tensions between Veda and dharma, exemplified best in the tension between Vedic animal sacrifice and the dharma's radical ideal of ahimsa.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, there is "a decisive gap between revelatory vision and its ritualistic substance" (97), because the dharma has to invoke the authority of a revelation that has no real connection to the world (1985:88). Instead of an axial breakthrough as in Buddhism, vision and revelation are replaced by the "rational order of ritualism that by itself constitutes ultimate truth and leaves no room for anything so unsettling as revelatory vision" (1985:97-98).

In other words, the ethical doctrine of ahimsa which emerges clearly in later Upanishadic thought, parallel to Buddhist and Jaina thought as we shall see in the next section, always remained tied to the conception of the impurity of violence, a violence that was absolutely necessary in order to attain life, but which had stopped circulating. The classical ritual tried to control the power of this violence, and it is in this context that an ancient ahimsa emerges. In doing so Vedic ritualism on the one hand "outlawed conflict and violence," while at the same time "the whole of the dharma had

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<sup>39</sup>According to Alsdorf (1962:572-573)., Manu's characteristic contradictory and paradoxical style, where "(...) Altes und Neues einfach nebeneinander, oder vielmehr nacheinander, gestellt ist ohne Rücksicht auf die sich ergebenden flagranten Widersprüche," bespeak the slow emergence of vegetarianism. In light of the fact that old injunctions were never dropped, but simply amended, these scriptures allow a formidable view into the past. This is true for the levirate as well as meat consumption and vegetarianism.

<sup>40</sup>Veda is *shruti* (revelation), dharma is *smṛti* (remembrance), the former was "heard" though oral transmission but initially "seen" and "found" by seers (*rishis*). The latter was merely "heard" though oral transmission. Thus the latter is not revelation.

to rest on, or even had to be contained in the *shruti*” (revelation), which amounted to a fiction (102), because the Veda itself is full of an affirmation of violence. In this, Heesterman sees the most significant difference to the “radical new beginning” that Buddhism was able to accomplish through its outright rejection of the Veda (95) in comparison to later Hindu thought.

If life meant eating death, the circulation and mutual ingestion of death in the earliest phase, life in the classical phase meant to undo death magically. By withdrawal from the exchange of death, it seems, the Brahman became the sole officiant of a ritual, whose violence he controlled, but whose risks was carried by the patron of the sacrifice. Death is no longer circulating and thus threatens to linger and attach itself to something else as we have seen above. It is now that ahimsa as a magical technology of protection of the person responsible for the sacrifice, the patron, emerges. This dominance of the Brahman, however will be resisted as we shall see below, both from without as well as from within its very own tradition.

### 1.2.3 III. Renunciation and *ascesis*

With the emergence of the world renouncer, the reality of violence goes through a significant transformation. If in the classical ritual of Vedic sacrifice *violence was not called by its real name*, but nonetheless acted out, the emerging renouncer *by calling violence by its real name* tries to avoid it by all cost. As if his word now takes the place of the act, the renouncer identifies violence and condemns it unambiguously. From afar, one imagines that all the careful and prudent attempts of the ritualists to wrench away death from the killing suddenly simply failed, and violence appeared in the clear light of a new age, delineated and considered absolutely deplorable.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Some authors reference Karl Jaspers’ (1949) *Achsenzeit*, the “axial age.” (

The Brahman ritualist received a severe critique from the renouncer (*sanyasin*), who identifies violence in the very ritual that tries not to speak its name and control its dangerous effects magically. Alsdorf (1962) already convincingly argued that this was not simply a Buddhist and Jaina heresy to Brahminical thought, but a much more significant and general movement in ancient India, which is not completely understood even today. Schmidt (1968:634pp.) shows how the vows of the Brahmana are closely aligned with those of the renouncer (*sannyasin*) and wandering ascetic (*parivrajaka*). Instead of securing the “goods of life” (cattle, honor, wealth) through substitution, the renouncer’s goal is self-denial: he denies himself the desire for the animal, the desire to devour and keep alive.

Many authors see in the internalization of the Vedic fire sacrifice into the body of the renouncer the first step towards an ethical doctrine of ahimsa, which in fact emerges in this phase. The renouncer (including Jain and Buddhist monks) ethicizes ahimsa by internalization of the sacrifice into the body (Schmidt 1968, Selvanayagam 1996, Heesterman 1964, 1985). Violence is now directed against the self in *ascesis* (*Askese*). In the renouncer’s revolution of Vedic sacrifice, the animal substitute is replaced with the sacrifice of the vital breaths of the *vanaprastha* (the initial renouncer-figure) and with the emergence of the gift of austerities and self-denial (Schmidt 1968:653).

Sacrifice and eating had already in Vedic times been closely associated with each other (Smith 1990). In addition, the ritual origin of the hierarchy of beings never effected any clear-cut division between humanity and animality (Biardeau 1989:37). The sacrificer itself was conceived initially as the first victim, and subsequently substituted by animals (Thite 1970:151, Schwab 1886: XIX-XX).<sup>42</sup> In one of the

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<sup>42</sup>*Purusa* was not only the first cosmic man, but also the first *pasu* (animal fit for sacrifice), that is, the first animal victim. Only then follows the horse, the cow, sheep, goat, in that sequence (Thite 1970:148). Note that in contemporary Gujarat the word *pasu* is simply used for animal without necessarily indicating its ritual status.

oldest myths of the Rig Veda (Doniger 1988:10-11), there is a description of cosmological creation, which describes the sacrificial fire (Agni) as created by Prajapati (Lord of Creatures). Agni was the “mouth” of Prajapati. But once created, it hungered to be fed. Its gnawing mouth opened so wide that Prajapati suddenly feared he himself might be swallowed up. Prajapati then quickly created animals, humans, and plants--sacrificial victims--to fill the unquenchable desire of Agni, his own mouth, the fire of sacrifice. Thus he is Prajapati, Lord of creatures. The legitimacy for violence in Vedic sacrifice is its cosmological necessity; the reason for death is creation, life, and birth. Without substitution there would be an even more fundamental threat because Prajapati, the creator of all creatures, would be swallowed by his own mouth leaving nothing, a void worse than all death.

The movement of renunciation and asceticism seems like a monumental attempt to resist this law of eating and devouring which lies at the foundation of the sacrificial logic, which was already present in this first cosmological sacrifice which defines all life as food for others (as substitutes for Prajapati himself). It espouses what Smith (1990) has termed, with reference to Nietzsche, the “culinary eternal return” and the chain of “alimentary violence”. Renunciation tries to escape from the gnawing mouth of Agni. Life should no longer mean either ingesting someone else’s death, or conjuring injury away from the killing with a magical technology that seemed increasingly suspicious.

In renunciation the sacrificial fire becomes corporeal in the body of the renouncer. One “denies oneself the natural tendency to live on other things” (Schmidt 1968: 653). The principle of substitution, which had ruled all sacrifices back to the first one, and of which all later ones are just replicas, is resisted. “By austerities one becomes emaciated, gives one’s own substance; thus the offerings of the *dikshita* who is practicing *tapas* consist of that which is growing less of his body” (Schmidt 1968:

653). The animals are spared and the renouncer resists substituting them for himself. There is no identification *with* an animal here for the sake of compassion, but a sort of de-substitution at work, a withdrawal from the exchange of death, which makes all food and eating highly problematic. Nor is this new theory necessarily based on conceptions of the *karman*-doctrine as is usually assumed but seems to precede it (643, 653).<sup>43</sup>

In a way, the renouncer acts as if he takes the initial injunctions of the Vedic sacrifice seriously.<sup>44</sup> The object of the sacrifice (the victim) is really always the subject of the sacrifice (the sacrificer). In the Vedic sacrifice the only authentic and non-symbolic sacrifice, that is, without substitution, was suicide (Sylvain Lévi 1966[1898]:32pp.). Sacrifice means that the sacrificer owes his own death to the fire, a suicide, which could only be avoided through the compromise of substitution. Consequently renunciation is continuous with Vedic sacrifice as the renouncer is sacrificer and sacrifice in one, and by avoiding substitution, offers himself, the purest and best of all sacrifices.

Now, however, something strange happens. Through the controlled offering of a substitute, death was delayed and life is wrought out of death. The renouncer, in turn, appears to critique the hypocrisy of this substitution. He seems, at first, to want to redress the equation by rolling it back to before the emergence of substitution, before the animal was replaced for the sacrificer. This, however, is what precisely does *not* happen. “The *sannyasin* does not sacrifice anymore as the *grhastha* [householder] does since he has himself become identical with the sacrificial fires which consist of the vital breaths [*prana*]. His sacrifice is an *atmayajna*, a sacrifice *in* his self (...)”

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<sup>43</sup>Some authors have suggested that the circulation of food in Vedic sacrifice prefigured the doctrine of transmigration as it was articulated in the early Upanishads (Smith 1990:182, Zimmerman 1987:206).

<sup>44</sup>That continuity not opposition defines the relationship between the institution of renunciation and Brahmanical orthodoxy is well developed in Heesterman (1964, 1985).

(Schmidt 1968:637, emphasis mine). The sacrifice *of* himself becomes a sacrifice *in* himself.

The renouncer does not exchange himself for the animal, but he merely gives up his desire for it; his desire is sacrificed in place of the animal victim's life. The animal is substituted by the desire *for* it. As Schmidt has it, "(...) the ascetic has to be indifferent towards the creatures by avoiding injury as well as favor" (1968:637). By giving up the desire for the world, but simultaneously remaining in it, however, the renouncer alters his relation to the world. This proceeds in a way similar to how the Brahman of the sacerdotal period appropriated the sacrifice by replacing the agonistic with the classical ritual described by Heesterman.

The sacrifice that once made the world possible is now in the body of the renouncer, whose withdrawal from exchange with the world takes the form of an interiorization of the fires that devour. Again, this is not identification *with* an animal, but an attempt to go beyond all identifications by realizing the oneness in all, by overcoming death. The renouncer dies symbolically to the world, but remaining in it claims that he has overcome it. Thus he strives to attain a death that is no longer a loss, a death that will allow him to rule over the entire conundrum of death and life. Famous renouncers do not "die," they enter *samadhi* (absorption)<sup>45</sup> and are always said to choose the time for their self-chosen departure.<sup>46</sup> While representing the highest perfection, completeness, the world renouncer can turn his back on the world because he ideally has emancipated himself from it (Heesterman 1985:39). His

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<sup>45</sup>Biardeau (1989:82) translates the term as "'concentration of the mind' --in which there remains no 'mental construction'."

<sup>46</sup>Basham (1989:43pp) discusses possible origins of the doctrine of transmigration in conjuncture with *karman*. One possibility is that the doctrine began as a secret lore associated with the sage Yajnavalkya, who later promulgated the new doctrine openly, "As a man acts in one life, so he enjoys happiness or sorrow in the next." Basham acknowledges that this contention is historically "dubious." Another places the origin of the conception with the Kshatriya chief Pravahana Jaivali of the Pancala tribe who uses the idea to shame the Brahmin Svetaketu for his utter lack of knowledge about the reality of rebirth after death (45pp). For an interesting comparative attempt to recast rebirth eschatology in a much wider scope, see Obeyesekere (2002).

relation to the world is fundamentally a broken one as he lives *in* the world while denying any relation of want *to* it.<sup>47</sup>

The renouncer ideally claims to have overcome life and death altogether in the equation of *atma* and *paratma* in Brahma (universal soul). “The renouncer (...) shaking off the whole weight of *karman* [first ritual action, then rebirth], seeks to recover the purity of his *atman*, i.e. of the self which he essentially is” (Biardeau 1989:38). The loss implied in death is overcome by claiming the world is nothing to him (*maya*), or, which is the same thing, that all reality is already entirely his (*parmatma*).

Smith calls this post-Vedic step a complete Nietzschean inversion of the Vedic world, where the ranking of the social order did not change but the rationale for the ranking did (1990:198). Instead of a domination based on power, nature and culture were disjointed. The violence of nature was referred to as *samsara* (cycles of rebirth) and cultural practices like diet and ideals became more important to structure the world of men. Vegetarianism and nonviolence become signifiers of purity (Zimmerman 1987, Smith 1990).

Whereas Vedic ritual attempted to define a space where it would control a violence, which ruled supreme and chaotically in the world, asceticism is concerned with a violence outside of the sacrificial compound, outside the renouncer’s body. As if the internalization of the sacrificial fire into the body of the renouncer caused the violence of the sacrificial ground to spill into the world, living begets its most complete expression in someone who denies life by emancipation.

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<sup>47</sup>Basham (1989:38) claims that this new “pessimism” occurred at a time of great material progress, petrification of varna distinctions, ritual dominance of the Brahmans, and Kashtriya claims to political dominance. He has it that “(...) doubts arose as to whether life in the other world was eternal. It was explicitly stated that heavenly joys were also transient and that “from world to world deaths find one out.””

It is significant that in the underbelly of this philosophic world-renunciation are ascetic techniques of renunciation, which all become identified with incredible magical powers. The non-worldly powers of the traditional ascetic become the foundation for civilized life of the man-in-the-world, its logical inversion. King Ahmad Shah, the founder of Ahmedabad, for example, was not able to build the city gates until he had propitiated a local Sadhu Manek whose name adorns a plaza in the old city center. Many villages in North Gujarat, too, trace their foundation to wandering ascetics that have defeated local ghosts at a time before all settlement. Famous renouncers and their feats haunt the imaginations of folklore and legend (e.g. O'Flaherty 1973). Every city has local sets of historical *saniassins*, *sadhus*, or *bapus* whose magical powers, accumulated through *ascesis*, are always ambivalent and never simply benign, if one cares to listen closely. Thus they have to be propitiated by Kings and Chiefs. We can see how magical techniques, which seem initially invested in getting rid of death, end up ruling over the entire sphere of death and life. Feared and desired at the same time, the power achieved through *ascesis*, abstention, reenters the sphere of the living in many ways.

The technical, or rather alchemical aspect of renunciation and the accumulation of ascetic power can perhaps best be understood by looking of the occasional reversal of the ascetic principles. That meat never lost its other meaning besides meaning impurity, that is, the power over death, is perhaps best exemplified by Lord Mahavir's meat consumption recorded in the Jain canon of *Viyahapannatti* (Alsdorf 1962). Several authors have discussed the passage in which Lord Mahavir, the Jaina champion of non-violence, rejects two pigeons cooked for him when he is seriously ill, but demands a cockerel that has been killed by a cat. He eats the animal and gets well again (Alsdorf 1962:567). Jha refers to the same incident explaining that Mahavir needed to recuperate from a duel of Yogic power with Makkali Gosala (2002:73).



Here we see how the death of someone else when ingested, and as long as one is not contaminated by the reciprocal shadow of violence, still carries power even for the strictest of vegetarian renouncers, Mahavir himself. To ingest meat here means to have power over death, a logic, which we have already seen in the past and which will return in the future in myriad forms. Meat, as we will see, will never lose its ambiguous allure of power despite a continuous advent of vegetarianism.<sup>48</sup>

If the specific developments, which led to the emergence of renunciation remain uncertain to some degree, what seems significant is that this new “higher sort of religion” (Biardeau 1989:30) led the householder increasingly to resemble the renouncer. As Biardeau has it, “The ‘mental’ sacrifice—or ‘oblation with the breath’” indeed becomes not only associated with the renouncer proper but also with the master of the house (Biardeau 1989:31). “The Brahman living in the secular world adopts practices which are only conceivable in the renouncer (...)” (1989:31). These transformations are referenced in the Aranyakas, revealed texts of Brahmanism, which are, according to Biardeau, “most obscure” (31).

#### 1.2.4 IV. Complementarity

Death to the world while remaining in it creates the need for a symbolic separation from the world, which becomes the basis for a hierarchy based on distinctions and gradations of ritual purity (Dumont 1980, Zimmerman 1983). As we have seen the fusion into one functional unit of yajamana (sacrifier) and officiant (sacrificer) through “individualization” of the Vedic sacrificial ritual that constituted the very beginning of “brahmanical theory,” now simply comes into its own because

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<sup>48</sup>That ingestion means begetting power is well described in Smith (1990:179) for ancient times, where consuming food was considered an exercise of power: “Eating was both the source and proof of virility, of *virya*; conversely, emaciation was juxtaposed with fear. One’s food ‘is’ one’s virility, and therefore to take away the food of another is to take away the rival’s masculinity.”

with the interiorization of the entire ritual the officiant's service becomes altogether superfluous (1985:39). The renouncer is ideally complete in himself.

To understand this I had to read methodologically the emergence of the renouncer with the logic of the Vedic sacrifice that preceded it as is suggested above.<sup>49</sup> The part of the violence that is diverted from the killing of the animal is split, one part targets the self's desire for the world and supposedly destroys it. Essentially, this is the renouncer's relationship to the world: a "broken" relation to it. He is not *of* it anymore. The other part is displaced onto the social for the creation of distinctions to make renunciation possible: complementarity emerges. This holds the more true if the renouncer is a "secular Brahman," or put another way, if the Brahman follows the injunctions of renunciation.

That initially renunciation was not about identification with an animal, or vegetarianism, is easily established. Neither the many first renouncer figures (hermits), who severely critiqued the Brahman ritualist's sacrificial practices, nor the Jaina and Buddhist monks, were vegetarians (Alsdorf 1962, Jha 2002). Initially, the renunciation that avoided violence was limited to a stage in the life of a young adept student, the *brahmacharya*, for instance, who was not supposed to engage in sexuality, or to eat meat, nor to sacrifice (three forms of *himsa*, violence). The young student was not yet considered capable of wrenching away the reciprocal violence engendered through eating, sex, and sacrificial killing. He thus offered to the world "fearlessness" (*abhaya*) as long as he could not yet control the violence ritually engendered by sacrificial exchange (Schmidt 1968).

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<sup>49</sup>Despite his comprehensive style, Tähtinen (1976:12) misses the implications of complementarity between householder and renouncer in his detailed discussion of ahimsa. Instead he compartmentalizes different values in Hindu thought, the *trivarga* namely dharma (ethical), artha (economic), and kama (hedonistic), which are of Vedic origin, and finally moksha (spiritual), which is of ascetic origin. It is the later which in the Upanishadic period becomes the apex of the system. By doing so the author merely describes the effects of a process that itself remains largely un-analyzed. He does stress, however, that in the later Dharmashastras and Puranas (like the Bhagavad-Gita), "Vedic orthodoxy" and moksha orientation of the ascetic movements are being integrated (13).

Even the fully elaborated ethical doctrine of ahimsa, which implied absolute celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and the renouncer's critique of animal sacrifice, did not mean vegetarianism at first. Central was, rather, a division of labor, where the eater of meat was not the killer of animals, according to the same logic that structures complementarity in the caste system (Dumont 1980, Pocock 1973, Alsdorf 1962). In the case of the monk, freedom from contamination of violence is reached through dependency on those who commit violence and thus are caught in its reciprocity, in the "meatness of meat" (Schmidt 1968, Smith 1990), or as I called it above, the reciprocal shadow of violence.<sup>50</sup> Those who slaughter or procure the meat are responsible. On them the shadow of reciprocal violence (contamination) falls. Complementarity, a division of functional roles, makes it possible to eat meat but escape the reciprocal consequences of the act of killing.

As Alsdorf (1962:563-4) shows with many examples, Buddhists and Jaina monks were allowed to eat meat, and in fact did eat meat--as long as it had not been slaughtered specifically for them. Begged food included non-vegetarian foodstuff, but it had to be a remainder of another man's meal. Only then was there no risk on coming under the shadow of the flesh food's reciprocal violence, "the meatness of meat." The fact that early Jain (and Buddhist) monks also ate meat, which is well established by Indologists, has become very problematic to state today.

One of the reasons why the texts of an older generation of Indologists are so refreshing is that they still had a sense of contradiction and critical distance, which allowed them to state this openly. All Jain scholars I met in Ahmedabad violently

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<sup>50</sup>The "meatness of meat" (*mamsa*) is an ancient pun according to Lanman (1884) in *Manu and the Mahabharat*, which Schmidt refers to as a "pseudo-etymology." *Mamsa* means meat, but *sa* means 'he' and *mam* means 'me.' "Me will eat in the next world whose meat I eat in this world; the wise proclaim this to be the meatness of meat" (1968:629). These sorts of puns, re-interpretations, and hermeneutical revaluations, are typical for the post-Vedic period embarrassed by an older tradition that is authoritative on the one hand but must be denied on the other. Alsdorf (1962) refers to these as "*vegetarische Umdeutungen*." especially severe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as we can see in contemporary Gujarat.

deny this fact to the point of anger, an anger justified in the name of ahimsa. But even Western colleagues in the US, whom I have met at conferences, at times excused themselves from such discussion with the argument that they do not want to offend the feelings of members of other cultures, religions, and beliefs by acknowledging inconsistencies.<sup>51</sup>

Ahimsa, in the cases just summarized, denoted the absence of responsibility for killing, not the rigid dietary restrictions or animal protection of the present. The ascetic doctrine attempted to take the renouncer out of the position of responsibility for violence and the necessary reciprocity implied in it (the shadow of violence). At the same time it left a world of laypersons behind who were meant to provide for the monks and take the reciprocal effects of violence onto themselves.

Many acts were considered violent ones, not only killing animals as such. Alsdorf (1962:561-2) describes the discussion between an Adhvaryu (officiant priest at a sacrifice) and a Yati (ascetic) who mentions not only eating, but also smelling, walking, seeing, breathing, living: all activities that are implicated in the production of injury and harm to the elements. The renouncer was to act in the world in such a way as to escape the reciprocal shadow of a violence, which was seen as absolutely necessary and natural. The naturalness of violence in the Vedic worldview and the necessity of violence in sacrifice is equally continuous with the Jain renouncer's tradition of the inevitability of violence against spirits (*jiva*, souls) of the elements (water, fire, grains, etc. all that can be hurt).

The dependency of the Jain monk on the layperson, even to boil water, for example, reveals how the logic of substitution within the Vedic sacrifice has been

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<sup>51</sup>This sort of comment is problematic because it denies completely the political dimension of questions such as scriptural authority, ahimsa and vegetarianism, which are all integral to everyday politics on the Indian subcontinent. The persecution and even murder of Dalits insisting on beef consumption, tribals who sacrifice animals to their deities, Muslims insisting on cattle slaughter, or authors such as D. N. Jha, who are threatened by the *Sangh Parivar* when stating that in ancient India beef was consumed, are just a few points in question (Jha's case is discussed in chapter nine).

transformed into a logic of complementarity of roles.<sup>52</sup> The only alternative for this dependency would be suicide, the same as in the sacrificial complex (Silvain Lévi 1966 [1898]).<sup>53</sup> Indeed the highest ideal of Jaina monks is a fast unto death (*samlekhana*, *sallekhana*). When complementarity breaks down there is only death. Only withdrawal from all interactions with the world makes possible the absolute purity of death in Jaina thought.

The ethicization of ahimsa through the emergence of the *ascesis* of the renouncer is important, as it becomes the basis to understand the hierarchy of caste values based on the pure-impure distinction. Caste hierarchy itself is a sort of petrification of violence, the violence of complementarity, where the impurity of the “untouchable” makes possible the purity of the Brahmins. This complementarity is already present in the fact that with the institutionalization of renunciation, inclusive of Jaina and Buddhist monks (but not the ideal *vanaprastha*, the forest dweller) are inherently dependent on the layperson. But it is in the exclusivity of the Brahmin that complementarity becomes indicated in its severest way.

Through the routinization and institutionalization of renunciatory values in the caste system the renouncer’s violence against the body has become externalized into the social again, into the social body (Douglas 1964) organized through the boundaries of hereditary occupation. It organizes the social like a physical body: the impure of the body (semen, shit, piss, urine) is unavoidable but must be transformed, cleansed, kept at a distance, much as the “untouchable” must be transformed (reformed), cleansed, kept at a distance. Through the separation of spheres, which affect each

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<sup>52</sup>Alsdorf (1962:571) shows that the early Jain monk is not allowed to boil water on the one hand, as that would injure the spirit of the water element. But on the other hand he is not allowed to drink un-boiled water either, as there might be some *jiva* (living beings, soul) in it. Again, as in sacrifice, the best solution would actually be to die of thirst: suicide. This is precisely the highest ideal of Jain monks, even today. The most revered Jain saints have all fasted themselves to death.

<sup>53</sup>This suicide is either achieved socially by complete isolation as is the case with the ideal *vanaprastha* (forest dweller, hermit), who becomes death to the world, or physically as in the case of *atma-vadha* (suicide), *sallekhana* (voluntary death from starvation), and *itvara*, the Jain fast unto death (Tähtinen 1976:26, Glasenapp 1999[1925]:468).

other but do not mix, the Brahman is capable of ideally keeping away from everything that is related to death (Biardeau 1989:64).<sup>54</sup>

The complementarity between diverse dietary regimes is best epitomized by the distinction between priestly injunction and royal privilege, between Brahman and Kshatriya (Dumont 1980). “The sannyasin model (...) lies behind the Brahman’s total inability to defend himself by force, the use of force being exclusively reserved for kings” (Biardeau 1989:63, 2003:94). The violence of a duel, or its extension in war, become a legitimate context for violence and even compulsory acts for a King responsible for the protection of his subjects, including women, cows, Brahmans. The death of a king in battle, for example, can be assimilated to a sacrifice, a legitimate form of violence, and the “kings may practice hunting” where “the murder of animals is considered parallel to that of enemies” (Zimmerman 1999:184, Biardeau and Malamoud 1976:134).<sup>55</sup> The complementarity of opposing injunctions becomes that between dharma, as the good, and artha, as material interest. “The *dharma* and the ideal of nonviolence are reconciled with the idea of the *artha*, which includes warfare, hunting, and the necessities of medicine” (Zimmerman 1999:185).<sup>56</sup>

The many contradictions and ambivalences on the question of violence in Hindu thought are well exemplified in the epic Mahabharata, which Marcel Mauss

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<sup>54</sup>In the Dharmashastras (especially the Manusmirti) we thus find both injunctions: the allowance to eat meat if it has been purified by sacrifice (offered to the Gods and ancestors) and at the same time the suggestion that to abstain from it is highly meritorious (Alsdorf 1962, Biardeau 2003:85-104). Ancient Brahmanism here fuses Vedic sacrifice (where killing in sacrifice is no killing) with renunciation.

<sup>55</sup>“The Kshatriya of the epic is a meat-eater, a drinker of wine to the point of drunkenness, a lover of women, a great hunter—killing for sport, therefore, and not solely out of necessity—a slayer in war or otherwise, and ready to die on the field of battle: rough ways and respect for the Brahmans characterize his dharma” (Biardeau 1989:64). This description resonates ethnographically in Gujarat with stereotypes of the Muslim, in whom the old fear by the vulnerable Brahman of the warrior reappears but this time stripped and devoid of any epic grandiosity.

<sup>56</sup>This complementarity between the need to kill and the abstention from it is described by Tambs-Lyche (1992) for Saurashtra, where the crucial divide is not between Brahman and Kshatriya but between Vaishnava merchant and Shakta warrior, Vaniya and Kshatriya. It expresses the fundamental tension that Heesterman identified very early and which he sees as the foundation for the uneasy relation between the violence of Vedic sacrifice and the dharma injunctions of ahimsa.

called “the story of one gigantic potlatch” (1975[1950]: 109).<sup>57</sup> The epic begins with a sacrifice and ends in war while simultaneously espousing ahimsa (non-violence) in many places. In contradistinction to Manu where only Brahmins seem to be associated with purity, the epic defines the prince as pure by definition in his duty towards the Brahmin, “because he must be pure in order to exercise his royal function” (Biardeau 2003:92).

In the epic, renouncers come to act like Kings (e.g. Brahmin Drona versus Kshatriya Drupada) and Kshatriya inhabit the power of Brahmins, for example Arjuna onto whom is conferred the secret Brahminical weapon of Drona (Biardeau 2003:91pp., 99pp.). But the competition just cements the fact of complementarity of roles between *kshatra* (power of King) and *brahmin* (power of Brahmin). What becomes significant in these myriad syntheses of the complex development sketched above is no longer *if* violence is committed but only *how* it is committed, that is, if it is according to the dharma.

Thus we find finally in its most important section, the Bhagavad Gita, a veritable synthesis of Vedic and Sramanic traditions (Selvanyagam 1996), of sacrifice and renunciation. Standing in the battle field, Arjuna wants to renounce the violence of killing his relatives in war, but Krishna teaches him to fulfill with utmost devotion his duties as a warrior, while promising that he will remain untainted and unsullied if he renounces the fruits of his very actions.<sup>58</sup> “War becomes pure as ritual sacrifice, for it is indeed a sort of sacrifice which can be perpetrated for the greater good of all the worlds and not for one’s own well-being” (Biardeau 2003:102).

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<sup>57</sup>It is unfortunately unclear amongst scholars of ancient India whether the Manu preceded the epic. But whereas in Manu ahimsa is looked at from the perspective of the Brahmin, in the Mahabharata the question of violence is posed from the position of the King, who, albeit, is not outside but “within Brahminism” (Biardeau 2003:92).

<sup>58</sup>See passages in the Bhagavad Gita which seem influenced by the prior Chhandogya Upanishad, where all life was interpreted as great sacrifice, and the concept of *karman* which denoted all ritual activity (thus especially sacrifice) comes to stand for all human activity. “All human activity should be treated as a kind of sacrifice (...). ritual sacrifices offered in a selfish spirit are sacrifices in name only (...). All ritual must be performed in self-surrender, without attachment to the result” (Basham 1989:89).

Dharma as the replacement of the ancient *rta*, the cosmic order, allows for the re-inscription of sacrificial violence as legitimate violence in no uncertain terms. In transcending the self-desire of violence (*himsa*), *himsa* becomes a form of *ahimsa* (the absence of the desire to kill) even for a King. In this respect *ahimsa* is absolutely unequal to the modern or Western concept of non-violence. Violence committed in the spirit of *tyaga* (detachment) becomes equal to non-violence.<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting to note how the Bhagavad Gita has served in modern times for both, legitimatization for violence as well as legitimatization for an ethics of non-violence. This is perhaps best exemplified through a comparison between Gandhi and his assassin Nathuram Godse. While Gandhi interpreted his favorite religious book as an allegory for the “internal war” between good and evil within every soul, Godse, while waiting for the gallows, did not repent the killing of Gandhi but claimed that his acts were pure because his deeds had been committed in the Gita’s spirit of detachment from any personal gain, the fruits of action.<sup>60</sup> Godse had become the instrument of Her, Mother India.

In contemporary Gujarat, one might add, Jainism and Vaishnava traditions, Krishna worshippers, were mostly responsible for the abolition of animal sacrifice. The sacrifices were performed until fairly recently by many castes and groups in the context of the *shaktipuja* worship of the Mother Goddess. These groups, and the Vaishnava sects associated with them, seem to have been the motor of the modern advent of vegetarianism in the name of *ahimsa*. Their main targets were other groups such as pastoralists, animal herders, and agriculturalists in Kutchh, Saurashtra, and

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<sup>59</sup>Violence is however indicated where the sacrificial technology itself becomes a weapon as in the case of Drupada, for example, who attempts Brahminicide. Doubling the violence committed, first by killing a sacrificial victim, and second by using that very ritual to target an opponent, delegitimizes the rite, which thus becomes a case of “Black magic,” illegitimate violence of a double form (Biardeau 2003:99pp. and footnote 14).

<sup>60</sup>Nandy (1998:70-99). See also the enigmatic “Murder of Gandhi. What? Why? When?” supposedly a collection of statements by Nathuram Godse spoken in his cell before his execution and published by “Vir Sawarkar Samitee, Pune.” Ironically, the booklet in my possession is dated 1930!



central Gujarat (Tambs-Lyche 1992, Pocock 1973, Westphal Hellbusch, Westphal 1976).<sup>61</sup>

In the sixteenth century with the rise of Vaishnava missionary activity in Northern India, the theistic *bhakti* movement targeted specifically the Shaktas and the *shaktipuja* worship complex. The worshippers of the Goddess were on the one hand conceived as impure; on the other the Vaishnavite missionaries invested a considerable amount of labor to convert them to vegetarianism in the name of ahimsa.<sup>62</sup> Drawing their belief from the Bhagavatapurana, ahimsa became the supreme *dharma*, understanding the term as both, complete abstinence from meat as well as absolute interdiction of Vedic sacrifice, this time under *any* circumstance.

With the Vaishnavas we not only see a strong bend towards conversion and missionary activity enter the scene, but also the advent of ideals of gentleness and compassion towards all living creatures. As Clémentin-Ojha (2003) has shown, the blood-sacrifices in the context of Mother Goddess worship envisioned in the Kalikapurana and performed by the Shaktas had relied conceptually on the traditions of ancient Vedic sacrifice. The killing of an animal was legitimized through the same ancient Brahmanical formulas, that “killing in sacrifice is no murder” (2003:129). The Vaishnava preacher-missionaries, in turn, used many of the same arguments against the proponents of the Shakta cults that ascetics had used against Vedic sacrifice (131).

In the successful conversion of the Devi (Goddess) to Vaishnavism through the reputed Harivyasa, for example, we find simultaneously emphasized on the one hand a

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<sup>61</sup>For more recent buffalo sacrifices outside Gujarat see Jha 2002:120-1.

<sup>62</sup>In fact we have here, in the context of Harivyasa’s conversion of the Goddess to vegetarianism, the first explicit mention of disgust. Harivyasa’s entourage is incapable of eating anything and fasts out of protest for the killing of a goat, *after* the fact of slaughter (Clémentin-Ojha’s 2003:127-142). It is significant that disgust emerges in the context of conversion and the claim not only of ahimsa, but an explicit call to compassion with all living beings. Here the identification *with* an animal appears clearly. It should also be remembered that the *Bhaktirasabodhini*, that Clémentin-Ojha uses, is a commentary on the earlier *Bhaktamala*. The *Bhaktirasabodhini* is of the eighteenth century. It thus seems that the closer we advent to the present, the more likely the emergence of disgust on the one hand, and compassion with the animal on the other.

condemnation of the violence committed to the sacrificial animal, but at the same time an aggressiveness of the Devi toward enemies of a neighboring town. As Clémentin-Ojha points out, the ideal of compassion of the converted vegetarian Devi, as well as her new master, the Vaishnavite Harivyasa, is “trifle ambiguous” (2003:128).

As we have already seen in the epic conception of the relation between *brahma* and *kshatra*, the “disarmed Devi” places herself at the service of the Vaishnava. Her role becomes complementary to that of Vishnu, to whom she becomes the weapon in form of an *avatara*. “The god is thus spared the need to involve himself” (2003:134). “Thus Devi’s violence is placed in the cause of Vaishnavism and its values, amongst which is ahimsa” (2003:135). Significantly, the new vegetarian cult of the goddess is termed *vaisnavi-puja* (133). Violence against those who do not accept the principle of ahimsa and perform animal sacrifices is acceptable (135).

The veneration of the Mother Goddess has in no way diminished with the advent of vegetarianism. Ideally, she has simply stopped to demand the forbidden, the slaughter, which in the past nurtured her power. When the Goddess becomes vegetarian she becomes an extension of Vishnu. By abstaining from eating flesh of animals she becomes incorporated (swallowed) into Vaishnavism. She has given herself completely and avoided the substitution that causes someone else’s death. In *bhakti* it is the self that is symbolically offered in devotion instead of a substitute. But her former worshippers, too, cannot anymore give a substitute to her in place of themselves in sacrifice. She disallows their substitution, too. Instead she threatens to consume those who won’t give to her their submission and devotion (that is, themselves).

What is significant here is that the agonistic impulse of the Mother Goddess that was renounced in the name of Vaishnava ahimsa has not only found a new master,

but also a new target by disallowing substitution. Those who can't sacrifice to her anymore either have to become vegetarians, too, or become her possible enemy.

The peculiar nature of the caste system is that it makes possible the simultaneity of contrary values without the pressure for their resolution. The energy that is usually expended horizontally in conflicts becomes frozen vertically into hierarchy and separation. In the case of historical Saurashtra, it even resembled a dual organization: merchant groups financed the exploits of Kings and Chiefs, while themselves remaining associated with non-violence. This relativity of value, described by so many anthropologists, is at work even today in urban Ahmedabad. People often said to me, "They are allowed to eat meat. They are Muslims. It has less effect on them," or "To them it is no sin." What is allowed to some is forbidden for others. My argument in most of this dissertation will be that this complementarity is today collapsing.

What happens, however, if, in the face of a collapse of caste complementarity where substitution is rendered unethical, renunciation of the desire to devour fails?

#### 1.2.5 V. Active *ahimsa*

Finally, ahimsa culminates in Gandhi's independence struggle, *where this violence against the self (asceticism) becomes a "non-violent" weapon against the British*. Many scholars have argued that asceticism generally, and semen retention in particular, produces magical power through abstention (O'Flaherty 1973, Biardeau 1989, Alter 1997, Basham 1989).<sup>63</sup> With Gandhi, we now reach a synthesis: The violence against the self (vows and fasts, vegetarianism, self-sacrifice) is at the same

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<sup>63</sup>Basham (1989:40) claims, "[T]here arose the belief that by asceticism a man accumulated *tapas* (...) heat (...), but it came increasingly to mean a supernormal power that developed in man as a result of such practices as fasting, maintaining difficult and painful postures for long periods, and other forms of self-mortification."

time a weapon against an external enemy. For Gandhi the aggressor is simultaneously external (colonial empire) and internal (desire to harm).

This is not entirely new. As Spodek (1971) has shown, Gandhi's political repertoire was influenced by traditional forms of penance. The threat of self-mutilation and other forms of self-sacrifice abound in the Kathiawadi culture in which he was raised.<sup>64</sup> As Spodek describes with recourse to the work of Alexander Kinloch Forbes, founder of the Gujarat Vernacular society, "When chieftains enforced tribute payments from their vassals, they would station a member of the distinguished Bhat caste at the vassal's residence as security. If the tribute was not forthcoming, the Bhat would fast until it was paid. If fasting did not bring adequate pressure, the Bhat began to perform *traga* or infliction of wounds on himself. The technique, like Gandhi's use of the fast later, was not used where the Bhat and the vassal were enemies or even strangers to one another, but it proved effective where the two were mutually friendly and respectful so that the Bhat's sufferings would move the recalcitrant vassal" (1971:363).<sup>65</sup>

Krishanlal Mohanlal Jhaveri (2003:241-245, Vol.1), too, claims that one of the occupations of the Charan, a caste allied to the Bhat community, was acting as guards called *valavas* to travelers and goods in Kathiawad. Here the ritual *traga* (self-penance, self-mutilation) was not enacted between mutual friends, but between complete strangers. If the caravan of a merchant was attacked by marauding Koli or Rajput groups, the Charan's body would stand as material security. "The ordinary

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<sup>64</sup>Kathiawad is a synonym for Saurashtra, the Western peninsula of Gujarat, South of Kutchh.

<sup>65</sup>The practice of *traga* by the Charan caste is also mentioned in M.S. Commissariat (1957:369), during the visit of the French traveler Thevenot to Ahmedabad in February 1666, moving along the sea coast from Surat to Ahmedabad. The sea was unsafe at the time due to Malabar pirates, the land route due to robbers. Thevenot was advised to take into service two members of the tribe known as Charan, with a woman of the same class, "who would conduct him safely through the danger zone." As Thevenot describes, the Charan man was expected to cut his throat and the Charan women to cut off one of her own breasts with a razor in case of attacks by robbers. The dread of Charan power--in the form of "Charan's blood" or "Charan's ghost"--was widespread. The French traveler, however, declined the suggestion, "looking upon it to be too low a kind of protection." One wonders what Thevenot dreaded more, to be robbed by bandits, or to be protected by two Charan.

*traga* or sacrifice went no further than a cut on the arm with the *katar*” (2003:243). But at times it included the offering of their life in suicide, or the murder of their kin relations, “with the most complete self-devotion” (243). Usually the threat of *traga* sufficed as the attacking groups held the Charan in high respect and feared the supernatural consequences of the Charan’s threat of self-sacrifice.<sup>66</sup>

Here, again, we can see how complementarity and the reversal of violence into self-violence (self-sacrifice) create a culturally very unique mode of dealing with the threat of the reciprocal shadow of violence, which is feared. It should be noted that these techniques were employed in a society which Tambs-Lyche has described as divided in two ideal value models, the non-violent and vegetarian merchant ethos, and the martial Darbar model of the Rajputs (*kshatriya*) inclusive of Mother Goddess worship and meat-consumption (1992). The technique used by the Charan consisted in making someone else the cause of one’s own self-inflicted injury (the thieves), a mechanism I encountered in contemporary Gujarat in varied forms and which reached its peak in Gandhi’s ahimsa. It is reminiscent in principle to the techniques of Jain or Buddhist monks described above, who escape the reciprocal shadow of violence by eating only that meat, which was not procured specifically for themselves, of whose death they were not the cause.

The thieves in the examples above had no qualms about attacking a merchant’s caravan, but shunned inflicting any direct physical damage on members of a specific group, the ritual specialists, who were traveling together with the merchants as their material guardians. Being the cause for the Charan’s self-inflicted injury or death, the reciprocal shadow of violence would have befallen the attackers. The fear for the

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<sup>66</sup>Women of the Charan caste are even today held in high esteem. Many Gujarati local Goddesses, like Bahuchamata or Kodiarmata, are believed to have been Charan women before becoming divinized. There are still today living Goddesses of the Charan venerated by followers of diverse groups in Kutchh, for example. Perhaps the best ethnographic account of the Charan remains that of Westphal Hellbusch and Westphal (1976).

supernatural consequences was stronger than the fear of being harmed or defeated physically.

What is new is the context in which Gandhi espouses to these forms of power is the colonial context and the nationalist movement for independence. Drawing his strength from a newly attained position of cultural self-confidence, he was able to affirm parity symbolically with the British by espousing essentially “Indian” forms of resistance, which could also claim universality (Erikson 1969, Lloyd Rudolph and Suzanne Rudolph 1968, Spodek 1971). Gandhi was very successful in this universalization of ahimsa, which became a principle not only in India, but part of Martin Luther King’s Civil Rights Movement in the US of the 1950’s, for example, without any of the cultural associations with vegetarianism or ritual self-mutilation (*traga*).

In formulating the idea of ahimsa and constructing a new ethos, Gandhi had to alter caste complementarity, because essentially, it lies at the basis of the social separation of caste. But how to get rid of complementarity and separation, while retaining one of its highest expressions ahimsa as an ascetic value of abstention from all forms of harm? The contradiction is not as large as it seems at first because an ethical ahimsa had been conceived as a universal value since its inception especially in the Shramanic tradition, even if this claim had been deflected in its concrete empirical expression in caste and community (Schmidt 1968).

In 1921, when trying to define what is distinctive in Hinduism, Gandhi first focuses on the principle of Varnashrama. In Gandhi’s opinion, inter-dining and inter-marriage did not deprive a man from the status given at birth. According to him, the varna system of hereditary occupations, the four divisions that “define a man’s calling” (1921:32)--Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra respectively--are inherent in human nature and all are to serve God’s creation in their respective ways.

Seeming to endorse the Varnashrama principle, if it defines duties and not privilege and claim to superior status, he arrives at a critique of what he understands the principle's false practice today, the boundaries of innumerable castes expressed in commensality rules:

“Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a pious Hindu by taking toast at a Musalman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Musalman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Musalman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing its substance if it resolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody, but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.”<sup>67</sup>

This short passage is illuminating for three reasons. First, when talking about caste Gandhi suddenly mentions Muslims, which is not a coincidence but in fact elucidates his insight how the question of meat, status, and ahimsa are intimately connected in Gujarat. Second, he critiques with what he is often identified with today: his own much-discussed obsession with dietary restrictions. Is not Gandhi's concern for diet throughout his life somewhat contradictory to the literal gist of the words spoken above?

Maybe. But we perhaps do him an injustice if we fail to recognize that Gandhi always demonstrated sovereignty in his writings by using an Indian toolkit of culture while at the same time amending freely what he saw as a tradition's inherent

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<sup>67</sup>Gandhi 1921[1987]:32-33

shortcomings.<sup>68</sup> He was never a blind follower of “traditions,” but on the contrary, in my reading of him, he seems always acutely aware of the implications of what he is proposing. One problem Gandhi faced in espousing ahimsa and varna while calling for the overcoming of commensality and inter-marriage rules was that ahimsa also indexes vegetarianism, explicitly for Jains, Patel, Vaishnavas, and Brahmans, which were important interlocutors. Working in the tradition of social reform, Gandhi wanted to sever the hereditary stigma attached to specific occupations and diets while consolidating commensality and ahimsa as a more universal morality.

Third, Gandhi’s own experiments with meat consumption in early years had been in conjunction with his close childhood friend Sheikh Mehtab, a Muslim, who was detested by Gandhi’s entire family with the exception of his father (Erikson 1969:140). Gandhi’s son Harilal later identified with the young boy Mehtab’s “rebellious role” and converted to Islam. The homoerotic, and perhaps homosexual, encounter between young Mohan and Mehtab is well described in Gandhi’s autobiography and interestingly analyzed in Erikson (1969). Erikson stresses how following Gandhi’s death, his son Hiralal had nothing left to complete, nothing that his

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<sup>68</sup> Alter (1996:305) points to the influence of scientific discourse on Gandhi’s thoughts about natural healing, despite his stark opposition to allopathic medicine. His insistence on “experiments,” over traditional forms of authority prevailed in questions of self-government, self-reliance, and home rule, as well as personal health and diet. Alter explains Gandhi’s interest in such therapies as Juste’s naturopathy or Kuhne’s hydrotherapy versus “traditional” Ayurveda, for example, by the fact that they allow for individual independence and autonomy. Ayurveda not only lacks any observable proof, it also makes the patient dependent on the doctor. Thus in confronting a world that had extended in scope considerably compared to his father’s generation, Gandhi possessed an admirable ability for cultural osmosis--to identify, assess, and combine elements from everywhere--while remaining true to himself and striving for a specific type of sovereignty. Whatever influences or insights Gandhi gathered--be it renunciation in Tolstoy, vegetarianism in Britain, *Naturheilkunde* from Germany, or Upanishadic philosophy--his experiments were always indebted to, and fundamentally based on, observation, rationality, and transparency. The need for everybody to embody truth through celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and *ahimsa* (e.g. in physical exercises such as *pranayama* that do not develop muscular strength, but health and moral firmness instead), stood in clear defiance not only to imperial claims to scientific truth, but also to a sovereignty of will and body. Gandhi’s “biomoral” concern was not self-centered, but an attempt to arrive at a solution for a nationally conceived public health, where an “imagined celibate nation” would be able to accompany political independence with internal reform.



father left unlived, except for the young Gandhi's murdered self: Mehtab and his oh so Muslim seductions.

But I want to draw attention to another fact of the goat episode in the autobiography (1927:18-20). Gandhi explains, "The opposition and abhorrence of meat-eating that existed in Gujarat among the Jains and Vaishnavas were to be seen nowhere else in India or outside in such strength" (1927:18). The only astonishing part in this statement is that Gandhi speaks in the past tense. Then Gandhi explains, "These were the traditions in which I was born and bred. And I was extremely devoted to my parents." He continues, "I did not know that it [meat] had a particular good relish" (18). But Mehtab successfully convinced young Mohan nonetheless to "reform" and become strong like the British.

Then comes the day when Gandhi is to see "baker's bread" and "(...) for the first time in my life-- meat." They meet on a lonely spot on the river to eat meat. "The goat's meat was as tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating." Gandhi passes a terrible night, which included the nightmare of a goat bleating inside his stomach (Gandhi 1927:19). Nonetheless, surprisingly, Gandhi again accepts the invitation to eat meat. In the course of an entire year, which amounts to six meals, Mohan invites the young Gandhi to eat with him, paying for "expensive savoury meat-dishes" (19). Gandhi finally stops consuming meat with Mohan because he does not want to lie to his mother (sic) anymore. But Gandhi also decides to eat meat openly once his parents are dead.

The distance that Gandhi is able to place between the "particularly staunch" traditions in which he grew up, his parents to whom he is devoted, and the desire for "reform" is telling. Despite his reservations he convinces himself to eat meat out of duty to "reform." One might add what he omits, which is that he also might have

wanted to please the friend or his own curiosity. He always eats or abstains from eating meat essentially for others.

That meat eating might be a “reform” seems stated in slight irony in the text, especially when he mentions “Swaraj,” self-rule, and freedom (18). What is unexpected, however, is that Gandhi acknowledges the “savoury” taste of meat dishes of which he was unaware. After he had a terrible first experience of disgust, he returns to meat eating and tastes its quality. It is not the absence of disgust, but rather the quickness with which he overcomes it that is to be remarked upon. Gandhi’s vegetarianism passes through disgust into acknowledging its “savoury” quality back to abstention from the ingestion of meat. Thus he is able to overcome his desire for that power that he identified with meat initially in his childhood, the fact that it might help to defeat the British.

Overcoming his disgust for meat makes Gandhi’s vegetarianism--as strict as it was--a commitment devoid of the ambivalence of other renouncers, as we will see in chapters four or eight. Gandhi never returns to this initial moment of disgust. He never seems to feel disgust for others eating meat even if he might disagree with their dietary preferences. To put it more succinctly, Gandhi’s dietary habits do not take the form of disgust in the veneer of morality, but consist of a morality devoid of disgust (devoid of secret desire).

The universalization of the ethical doctrine of ahimsa, a doctrine that, unlike comparable Christian or Islamic doctrines, was able to encompass all human and animal life, suited his needs perfectly. Thus ahimsa was to be realized only when it became a universal value without the moral compartmentalization of caste complementarity and its dietary restrictions.

The absence of disgust in Gandhi, despite his insistence on dietary purity, is precisely his difference from many contemporary vegetarians in Gujarat. The

passivity of his ahimsa associated with renunciation becomes “innocence,” losing its concern with pollution, and in its active register, it embraces the world becoming “love.” One is mistaken, I believe, to identify in this merely an expression of the influence of Christian values, although a mutual reinforcement is likely, because one can find all of these aspects long before Gandhi in Jaina, Vaishnava thought, as well as in the great epics.<sup>69</sup>

Gandhi (1994:97-98) writes, “When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrongdoer. This non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. It therefore embraces even sub-human lives not excluding noxious insects or beasts. They have not been created to feed our destructive propensities. If we only knew the mind of the Creator, we should find their proper place in His creation. Non-violence is therefore in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Quran.

Non-violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man.”

Again, Gandhi is not necessarily the motor of these transformations but an important catalyst for new readings that are aware, open, and interested in the equivalence with Christianity and Islam. Despite Gandhi’s use of a terminology of renunciation that follows the logic of self-sacrifice, the thrust of his arguments on

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<sup>69</sup>Alsdorf (1962:589), for example, mentions *atmaupamya*, the rule to “set-the-other-equal-to-oneself” as an early equivalent to the Christian “love-thy-neighbor-as thyself,” which absent in Manu suddenly emerges in the Mahabharat tractatus.

ahimsa are always completely secular. Not overcoming death, or propitiating the Gods, but realizing human potential is at the core of his thought. Through ahimsa man becomes man, not God. Gandhi is thus already securely within a humanist discourse, which applies the concept of ahimsa as an “indigenous” concept with great scope and generosity, comparable to Christian and Islamic conceptions, that explicitly addresses all life. Gandhi never confuses human life with animal life. He never mobilizes disgust but in his own experience narrated in his autobiography.

But then Gandhi fused the principle of ahimsa with the issue of cow protection:

“The central fact of Hinduism is (...) cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world, And [sic] Hinduism will live so long [sic] as there are Hindus to protect the cow. The way to protect is to die for her.”<sup>70</sup>

He continues, “It is a denial of Hinduism and Ahimsa to kill a human being to protect a cow. Hindus are enjoined to protect the cow by their *tapasya*, by self-purification, by self-sacrifice. The present day cow protection has degenerated into a

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<sup>70</sup>Gandhi 1921[1987]: 33.

perpetual feud with the Musalmans, whereas cow protection means conquering the Musalmans by our love.”

This is a curious statement: to conquer the cow slaughterers through one’s love despite the fact they kill that which one is prepared to die for. Gandhi straddles the two poles. It seems as if Gandhi’s preparedness to die for the cow is predicated upon the Musalman’s preparedness to kill her. It seems as if the logic of sacrifice fudges the question of the status of the victim. Gandhi, however, follows the traditions of “non-violent” protest in Kathiawadi culture as well as the abstract ideals of renunciation. Whenever he speaks of “sacrifice,” he always envisages “self-sacrifice”:

“*Yajna* [sacrifice] means an act directed to the welfare of others. (...). Therefore, and also from the standpoint of *ahimsa*, it is not a *yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter that animals sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the *Vedas*” (Gandhi 1994:48). But unlike aggressive cow activists in his time and later years, Gandhi asserts in the following sentence that, “It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in *Vedic* scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of *Vedic* society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*” (1994:48).

“(R)enunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will therefore not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody” (1994:50).

Gandhi seems caught between several claims and challenges of the time, one having to define the essence of Hinduism, another being colonial domination. But he also speaks to Hindu orthodoxy and Hindu reform Movements, preparing the ground for a new “Hindu tradition” with a particular relation to that tradition. Gandhi’s assertions, therefore, are to be interpreted in the context of competing claims: those of the Arya Samaj, and their more martial claims to a legitimate *himsa* (*himsa* in war is really *ahimsa*), Christian influences of *Nächstenliebe* (love their neighbor as thyself), Islamic insistence on compassion and the avoidance of causing pain if unnecessary, and Vivekanand’s masculine Neo-Hinduism (“Beef, Biceps, and Bhagavad Gita”). All of these claims resonate in Gandhi’s selective rendering.

Most importantly, however, Gandhi also speaks to the Muslims. It is in cow protection that Gandhi perceives the condition of possibility for a rapprochement of a special kind between the two. It is unfortunate that Gandhi ultimately fused *ahimsa* with cow protection. But his intent was to include the Muslims to care for the cow. He saw in the abstention from the cow the possibility for Muslims to show their love for Hindus, that is, to transcend their own need for group assertion. As he failed with Hindus, however, so he did also with Muslims.

In Vedic times, the cow was *aghnya*, “that which cannot be killed.”<sup>71</sup> Schmidt (1968) interprets this to mean that the cow could only be killed in the context of sacrifice, and in sacrifice, as we have seen, “killing is no killing.” The cow was that which could not be killed precisely because it was killed. A guest was called a *goghna*, a cow killer, because a cow was to be slaughtered for his sake (Alsdorf 1962, Jha 2002). Ancient Sanskrit sources that confirm the eating of beef are so abundant that the denial of this historical fact must take elaborate forms of philological

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<sup>71</sup>Tähtinen (1979) translates the term as “that which may not be killed,” which gives the injunction a slightly different thrust.

euphemisms, redefinitions, omissions (for example the medicinal texts of Susruta and Caraka), often resulting in threats to those who stress the obvious today.

Not only was the cow to offer an apposite for condensation of group identity in the formation of a “Hindu” motivated against the colonial oppressor. After Independence it was Gandhians like Vinobha Bhave, who mobilized and led cow protection agitation in India. One of the oldest cow protection organizations in Gujarat is the Vinobha Bhave Ashram in Baroda. In the context of anti-colonial struggle the inviolable cow became a national totem and, in consequence the fact that it used to be slaughtered and eaten became a reason for guilt. Nothing is more denied today than the fact of ancient cow slaughter and beef consumption. And even if acknowledged, this fact affects little the accusation, that whenever Muslims or Christian eat beef, they do it to humiliate Hindus.

But unlike in Freud’s epic reconstruction of the *Urhorde* (primal horde) and the “*Totemmahlzeit*,” the father is not imagined to have been killed and replaced by a surrogate. In the national imaginary, it is the Mother who is imagined as replaced. The reversed Oedipal rebellion in contemporary Gujarat, as I will argue in the following chapters, always consists in a turning away from the Father towards the fullness of Mother, a prior fullness, however, that is filled with anger. In Gujarat, atrocities are committed, sacrifices are made, and the *ahimsa* taboo comes into its own as *himsa* always in the name of the Mother.

#### 1.2.6 VI. The emergence of disgust

In asceticism, there is an attempt to destroy all positive feelings toward the world. Instead of the animal, the renouncer’s desire for it is ideally sacrificed. The animal remains in the world, however, as does the renouncer, who now has fundamentally altered his or her relation to this world. The relation to the animal is transformed into a negative register, it is *un*-desired, that is, the natural desire for it is

given up. Animals cannot be desired as that could possibly imply the desire to devour them.

What happens, however, if the renunciation of the desire to devour fails? If the desire for the animal is not burnt to nothingness in the fire of the corporeal sacrifice of *ascesis*, the only way to abstain from devouring in the absence of a clearly demarcated division of labor is disgust, the symmetrical inversion of desire. Here we see a possible beginning of an explanation as to why today in Gujarat animal protection can take the form of disgust for their flesh. Alsdorf (1962:571) mentions an odd book by Katherine Mayos (1927), who in a visit to Ahmedabad described with horror the treatment of cows. Her observation could be supported by many statements made by Mahatma Gandhi himself, who complained bitterly about the treatment of bulls and cows in Gujarat, a state that identifies so strongly with them.<sup>72</sup> These statements resonate with contemporary animal activism and care in Gujarat. In a city like Ahmedabad the treatment of street animals in general does not indicate a special relationship of care towards them, other than feeding them. Compassion for an animal is hardly called for where disgust for its flesh is the rational for abstaining from its slaughter.<sup>73</sup>

If desire means the wish to devour, disgust takes the form of its opposite, revulsion and the impulse to vomit. As the symmetrical reversal of the desire to devour, which has been introjected and become corporeal, it has no language and is pure impulse and affect. But how to vomit something, that has never been swallowed? The object to be evacuated is mental; it is not inside the body. It not to be found

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<sup>72</sup>Tardeusz (1968), too, elaborates the odd mix of sentimentality and indifference in relation to cows in India.

<sup>73</sup>The purificatory role of the five products of the cow emerges earlier in Vedic texts than the prohibitions against the eating of beef from the early medieval period. According to Jha (2002: 130-2, 145-6) the term *panchagavya* itself (urine, dung, milk, ghee and curds) appears first in the Baudhayana Dharmasutra, where the lawgivers mention its use. Several texts of that time, however, prohibit its use by *shudra* and women.



inside because that which is to be vomited, is that which has been rendered unconscious, the desire to devour.

As a reversed desire introjected onto the body, disgust can therefore be understood as the anti-cathexis of the object. The desire to devour has become unconscious and can only appear in language as some external object, preferably that object whose desire to devour is to be erased by the very impulse to vomit. As repressed desire for it, this external object is secretively already inside. It is spoken or it is seen, two forms of incorporation, which initiates the abjection in order to prevent the desire to devour ever to reach consciousness. In this way, disgust is a failed renunciation. The failure to let go of the object, however, remains unconscious, and the intensity of revulsion prevents this failure from ever revealing itself.

If I am correct about this logic of disgust, then we might expect that with the collapse of caste complementarity, which allowed myriad access to the forbidden, instances of disgust (failed renunciation) increase. In contemporary central Gujarat, the collapse of caste complementarity takes the form of class and caste upward mobility, while remaining within and under the aegis of a high caste dietary morality. This is the scene that disgust enters.

## **Chapter 2.0 The Gujarat Pogrom**

### **2.1. Bracing for impact: February 27**

On the evening of February 27, 2002, the atmosphere in Ahmedabad is nervous and tense. I meet my friend Ranjitbhai at Regal, a well-established local vegetarian restaurant frequented by lawyers, businessmen, doctors, and other professionals, on Ashram road in West Ahmedabad. Everybody is talking about two issues: the burning of human beings at Godhra and the scheduled opening of the first McDonald's, just a few yards away from the establishment. This opening is intended for the beginning of March, and they say it will involve a "human chain."

It will be a "human chain" over the bridges and symbolize connecting the old and the new city, as well as East and West Ahmedabad. And it will break the world record for the longest human chain organized by the fast food giant for the Limca Book of Records, the Indian equivalent of the Guinness Book of Records. It will be also the first vegetarian Mc Donald's in the world, I am proudly told. But then the fast food giant suddenly changed plans and restricted the chain over the bridges to the West only. The police, who had expressed reservations earlier, remained skeptical even of the limited chain--due to how it might block traffic.<sup>1</sup> Alas, after Godhra and the threat of violence in Ahmedabad, the plan for a human chain was abandoned altogether and the opening of the restaurant had to be delayed!

Guests in the restaurant are borrowing cell phones and contacting relatives in the old city. Are they together with other people? they ask. Are they with someone trustworthy? Which route will they take driving their scooter home? The atmosphere is sober and no one mentions communalism. People seem to sense that something might happen.

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<sup>1</sup>Times of India February 26, 2002, "Police curb on Big Mac's human-chain plan."

The immediate effect of a communal incident for residents of Ahmedabad is to calibrate all behavior toward “caution” (*khaalji raakhvaanu joie*). Everyone speaks and acts more carefully, prudently avoiding certain areas of the city as well as certain topics. I know a husband who withdraws cash from the bank and frequently calls home to his family; a housewife who gets extra provisions of milk, vegetables and extra medicine from the pharmacy for her mother-in-law; a trusted neighbor who fetches someone else’s children along with her own early from school. Normal life is interrupted and the empty space emerging is filled with perceptive thoughts about eventualities and what might be possible.

Astonishingly, everyone knows what to do. No one panics or acts up but there is swiftness in the movements of people, which show determination to get ready for the storm in a safe location. The residents of the city might not expect a pogrom, but they are used to long bouts of communal violence and death is certainly in the air.

While Ranjit and I discuss the Godhra incident, a free-lance press reporter and photographer overhears us and politely asks if he could join the discussion. The owner of Regal leaves his cash registrar to join us and then come two Muslims, a helper from the kitchen and his cousin, who had just arrived with his scooter to take him safely home after work. They live in the predominantly Muslim neighborhood of Jamalpur and his family does not want him to ride the bus tonight. Public buses are typical targets in communal violence. The owner and the press reporter, both Hindus, leave no doubt that the *karsevaks* (temple construction volunteers) returning from Ayodhya were looking for trouble because they always do. The Muslims nod silently. Godhra was purposefully chosen, they tell me, as it is a city where divisions between Hindus and Muslims are replicated within the Muslim *quom* (community) also.

Whenever Muslims are divided among themselves, they cannot make peace with the Hindus I am told. And Muslims in Gujarat are usually divided. The

journalist laughs and says, “It is like ‘divide and rule,’” a common reference in Gujarat drawing attention to the fact that communal politics appear like an avatar of colonial politics and the fact that a handful of “Britishers” were able to rule and control the entire Motherland.

The scene is familiar to me: the two Hindus —the owner and the journalist-- speak for and about Muslims without feeling awkward that the two young Muslims are neither addressed nor asked to speak. It is a typical experience of hierarchy. In the presence of members of subordinate groups (women, Muslims, and Dalits) someone with authority--in this case the boss and the journalist, a customer with high credentials, often speak for them while they simply remain quiet.

Ranjit and I eat a vegetarian meal and then leave for Luckies Chai Walla, one of the most popular teashops in the city. Usually Ranjit does not drink tea immediately after dinner, as it is a “Muslim” *rivaaj* (custom), he tells me. Hindus drink tea before dinner, Muslims after. Luckies Chai Walla is located opposite a picturesque 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque, the Sidi Sayyid Jali Masjid. Named after a former slave of Ahmed Shah and well known for its intricate, delicate filigree stone carvings (*jali*), it is surrounded by a courtyard with a little rare green and provides a kind of opening towards the old city.

Nearby, I often sit anonymously behind the hidden dark glasses of *Food-In*, one of the most popular non-vegetarian restaurants in the city, or the adjacent vegetarian Agashye, one of Ahmedabad’s official culinary attractions, and watch Muslims perform their Pritial baths (*wajhu*) and pray (*namaz*). The mosque used to be inside the walled compound of the old Bhadra Citadel, of which only the entrance now exists, a few hundred meters to the north.

Situated at a street corner, Luckies Chai Walla’s is integrated into its surroundings. A rare tree is equipped with a sitting bench and several decorated

graves are in the shop's compound, making the tea experience akin to the experience at a Muslim shrine. It is the first time I am recognized by the owner of the teashop, through a friendly "nod" from the owner and servants. Muslims and Hindus of all colors and shapes mingle freely and talk about Godhra. The *chai* here is known for its delicious fatty unadulterated milk and the buttered buns that come with it. After this evening, it was closed for many weeks, and its kind of Muslim-Hindu interaction became impossible for months.

Ranjit leaves for his home village just outside Ahmedabad. I walk to Relief Road then all the way to the Kalupur railway station to buy a round of newspapers, and then back again through parts of the inner areas of Kalupur and Dariapur, named after two of the twelve gates of the former inner city wall built in 1486, in the time of Sultan Mahmud Begada, and named after a Muslim nobleman. Today both are known as "sensitive areas" of the walled city. In the growing dusk people fill the street, talking and clustering around corners. People look at me suspiciously when I enter side streets. They want to be sure that I am not a local. They ask, "Hallo! Hallo! Mumbai? Delhi?" For now, no one asks my name or religious affiliation.

As I return, I notice Relief Road is now full of police vans and jeeps, but I do not see the usual BSF (Border Security Force) or RAF (Rapid Action Force) that appear in the wake of potential urban violence and take charge of the streets. In the inner areas of Kalupur and Dariapur there is a visible and palpable avoidance of mixing of members of various communities. In "Muslim Dariapur" people gather around *masjids* and teashops. At a *panwalla* I am told that "*inshallah*" nothing will come of this terrible *akasmaat* (accident). After all, it was a local problem, because Godhra has been known to be communally tense. I retort that Ahmedabad too is known to be very volatile. A bearded man wearing a *topi* (skullcap) introduces himself as Amar and explains that the BJP cannot let violence erupt. "They would

like to but they can't," he smiles. "If *hinsa* (violence) were to erupt that would mean they would lose the next election. No party can survive on communal violence (*komvaad*)."

I pass into "Hindu Dariapur," just a few houses away, and people are watching the Godhra incident on TVs at pan shops. The camera zooms in on charred bodies; people react with many "ahhhs" and "ohhhs," and they listen attentively to claims of pre-meditation. When I ask what will happen next the man standing on my right tells me "*tofan, ladai kar she*" (They will make mischief, battle). I ask who will make *ladai* and, after a short hesitation bracing himself for English, he tells me loudly, as if that was well-understood, the "protector of Hindus."

## 2.2 *Bandh* in Ahmedabad

The following day, February 28, 2002, the VHP backed by the ruling BJP calls for a *bandh* (literally standstill, closure, strike). Thus begins the Gujarat pogrom. I woke up to an early morning that had hardly cooled from the searing heat of the previous day, and to the news that violence had erupted all over Central Gujarat. I was living in a two-bedroom apartment in Naranpura, a middle-class Hindu neighborhood in West Ahmedabad, with my two roommates, Bharat and Pratab. Bharat asked me to accompany him to his new job as "lecturer" at a University named after Babasaheb Ambedkar, the famous Indian Untouchable leader. His colleagues had demanded to meet me, the foreigner with whom he was living. I had hoped to convince him to drive me around the city on his motorcycle afterwards, as motor rickshaws are naturally unavailable in most areas during violence and I was unsure if using my own bicycle was a good idea.

We rode on the precious *Hero Honda* of his younger brother Mahesh, who recently brought the bike back from his home village. His younger brother takes care of the land of the family farm, while the older Bharat was encouraged to go to the city

and study at a university. Someone, Bharat explains, has to continue performing the *puja* at the little Mother Goddess temple in the middle of a large field of the farm; they hope for a good rainy season. He is the first of his family ever to leave the village for an academic career and the move was well planned and organized. In fact, it was a collective family decision.

That's why the *Hero Honda* belongs to his younger brother, as a kind of compensation, and Bharat has to take good care of it. One does not really need a motorbike in the city as buses and bicycles suffice for the close distances. For Bharat, however, the motorbike and the new university identity card, indicating in large letters that he is a "lecturer," fundamentally belong together. How can he, as a "lecturer," still take the bus or borrow my bicycle as he has done for so many months?

Despite the news of Godhra, Bharat is in a good mood. He spends the entire early morning on my phone telling everybody about his new job. He contemplates his new marriage plans; being in a better position, perhaps he can now reconsider his choices. I ask him to find out where in the city there will be trouble today, not having decided yet whether I should then go to those places or stay away. He calls friends in his home-village of Mahesana. They seem strangely better informed than our Patel neighbors in Naranpura. He shows neither fear nor anger at the Godhra incidence, and tells me calmly that I will get to see the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) in action today as well as the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad).

The night before we had talked about the Godhra incident, and he had confessed that that he was fully behind the RSS line. "Muslims" (he uses the expression *miya loko*) were his real "weakness," meaning that he can't stand them.<sup>2</sup> In fact two-and-a-half years ago, he confided to me, during my initial language study,

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<sup>2</sup>There are many expressions to refer to Muslims in Gujarat. Gujarati dictionaries translate the term *miya* as "Muslim," or simply as "Mister" or "Gentleman." When used in Ahmedabad, it can carry derogatory meanings.

that his “guru,” Professor Vyas, an old RSS man turned Gandhian, had advised him to live with me and use this friendship to overcome his “weakness.” For many years Professor Vyas had taught in a Muslim college in the old city. He wanted Bharat not only to pick up some English from me but also to get acquainted with a foreigner—even better that I sported a Muslim-sounding name. Indeed, Bharat became my friend, though I doubt he ever got over his weakness.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was because I am German with a Persian last name, and therefore not enough of a Muslim to disabuse him convincingly of his weakness.

Bharat’s colleague, Dipesh Jani, drops by to pick us up. He introduces himself to me with, “Hello. I am Brahmin. One should not drive alone today.” There is confusion about who is imposing a *bandh*. Some say it is the VHP, others say the government. There is speculation that there will be a call for a *bandh* tomorrow by the opposition Congress Party, but other people claim it will be called by the ruling BJP.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Months later I grasp the full meaning of this exchange when I visit his home village where everyone believes I am a Muslim; people are curious of Bharat’s “Muslim friend.” In fact even while staying there, he chose to introduce me to the local village elementary school teacher as a “Muslim,” of which I was not very pleased, still shaken by the violence I witnessed. Bharat had never explained this misunderstanding to the people in his village, in part because he himself never quite understood it. He often insisted I was Muslim, because my father was from Iran and his name is Ismail. For Bharat, to be Muslim is not the same as believing in the Islamic faith. You can, for example, be a Muslim who worships the Mother Goddess, as some Fakirani do in Gujarati villages, or a female saint like the Sidi, a local Muslim community. But you are still the son of a father of a Muslim caste. To be “Muslim” does not imply specific beliefs. My insistence on the separation of my name from its linguistic origin, as well as from the beliefs in the location of my upbringing (being a “secular German” with an Iranian name in a largely Christian country), always appeared somewhat phony to Bharat. Thus as long as I did not claim another explicitly religious identity, like Parsi or Christian, for example, he had a real problem of not giving some category to work with even if he understood well who I was. My claim that my father was not a Muslim though he grew up in Iran never made sense to him. For Bharat, I cannot remain what he considers to be an empty cipher. This example exemplifies well why the “secular” is often understood to be something like a perversion, a claim to be what one does not signify, and to signify what one claims not to be. Bharat’s confusion suggests why the concept of “pseudo-secularism” resonates so much in Gujarat.

<sup>4</sup>The confusion as to who actually imposed which *bandh* is significant as it suggests how the political field is perceived. The indifference reveals the closeness of those civic institutions considered part of the *Sangh Parivar* (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh--RSS, Bajrang Dal--BD, Bharatiya Janata Party--BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad--VHP, and countless smaller ones). Initially, it was the VHP who had called for a two-day *bandh* after the Godhra incident, backed by the BJP party office, the ruling BJP government, and the Congress party. In the streets it was the RSS, VHP, and BD who subsequently enforced the *bandh*. For Dipesh, Bharat, and Pratab, however, there never was any difference between these organizations and the ruling BJP anyway. All my questions to that effect are met with the



We begin driving north and try to find some way towards the Subhash Bridge in the direction of Shahibag. But we immediately encounter roadblocks, objects placed in the middle of four-way intersections, to divert or perhaps merely to slow down the morning traffic. All over the city traffic is stopped and diverted. Youths with orange headbands position themselves strategically on street corners. They shout “*Vande Mataram*” and light bonfires to intimidate local residents.<sup>5</sup> I witness absurd scenes on the street that seem to reverse usual hierarchies. Adolescent-looking men in T-shirts and on foot give orders to professional businessmen in fancy cars.

As we drive past these scenes Bharat turns his head to me and says in a monotone, “R-S-S,” making the sound of the acronym more dramatic. I am astonished that they are not wearing their usual khaki shorts, white shirts, and the typical RSS headgear. Bharat is familiar with the party, as he had joined a local *shakha* (branch) in his home village. For almost two years he volunteered to be an RSS “social worker,” and through this work made many helpful connections. Months later I query Bharat about what he precisely did in the RSS, and he confessed that what he had never told me before, that he was still was a member.

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assertion that they are all the same. Everything that happened from now on until many months later is considered “government-backed,” the government being that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is a BJP man and an RSS *pracharak* (functionary). The RSS is the mother organization of the VHP, and the latter of the BD. The significant differences are not between institutions of the *Sangh Parivar*, but between politicians like Narendra Modi who confront the enemy, or politicians who pursue quieter ways, like his predecessor Keshubhai Patel. Both, Patel and Modi, were members of the RSS.

<sup>5</sup>*Vande Mataram* is often translated as “Hail to the Mother(land).” Aurobindo Ghose’s authoritative translation is, “Mother, I bow to thee.” A major aspirant for being the national anthem of India, the song *Vande Mataram* was eventually overtaken by Tagore’s not less controversial *Jana Gana Mana*. *Vande Mataram* seems to have the status of a mantra in Gujarat, as it is used sparingly. Originally composed by Bakim Chandra, and first printed in 1875, it was considered the “national anthem of Bengal” during anti-British processions in 1906 during the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal. It appears in the author’s highly controversial novel *Anandmath*, which ends with an admission of British power as undefeatable for the time being, and the Muslim era as finally over. Although used by the Congress as “national song of India” before the 1930’s, it was finally rejected as national anthem on the grounds of its one-sided Hindu symbolism (by Jains, Buddhists), its penchant for idol-worship (opposition by the Arya Samaj, Muslims, as well as Christians), and the fact that it was really written only with the state of Bengal in mind.

The young armed men we see on the road look rather harmless, physically thin and not particularly well trained. Their thin wiry bodies remind me of Bharat. They all look small and unprofessional, though they behave proudly and with much hubris. Some middle class men on their way to work seem bothered and annoyed, but they do not stop or challenge the young men. Everyone, including Bharat, avoids direct eye contact. It appears that policemen have taken the day off, for now no one is regulating the heavy morning traffic. I want to talk to some of the young men but Bharat, who never likes to admit to fear, quickly and with an unusual firmness, disabuses me of this idea.

“It’s dangerous” (*khaternaak chhe j*), he explains. It would be dangerous to stop and approach them. Why? Why should *he* be afraid? Bharat tells me that I do not understand. He is afraid they might use his younger brother’s motorbike to light a fire. The financial loss would be devastating. “They can do that, now, that could happen,” he tells me. “Anything can happen (*kuch thai shake*) today.” I am told not even to try and ask them a question.

Many roads are blocked with wooden planks, beds, cupboards from somewhere. These objects are then set on fire. Standing around the bonfires, young men cry out, laugh, and raise their arms. Cars, two-wheelers, and bicyclists try to drive around them, making traffic chaotic. They use loud whistles and order the drivers of jeeps and fancy cars to go this way, or that way. No one seems to panic, and I am astonished that these youngsters take control with impunity. People obey. They carry *laathis* (large bamboo sticks), stand around, and then give orders with an authority that reminds me of the way Ahmedabadi policemen regulate traffic at large gatherings like cricket games or overcrowded cinemas.

Frequently traffic policemen threaten rickshaw drivers with their bamboo sticks at large gatherings, and if they do not comply, they enthusiastically smash the

red sidelights of the rickshaw. If the lights are already smashed, they sometimes beat the drivers instead. Men on scooters, bicycles, and motorbikes try to stay altogether clear of the reach of these police *lathis*. I often see traffic police beat especially poor-looking bicyclists who break one or two of the endlessly bendable traffic rules. I never saw a car driver being beaten. By whistling aggressively and directing traffic, the youth are mimicking the police without realizing it.

I stand in a long line of vehicles waiting to bypass the roadblocks and observe the chaotic scenes. A group of pubescent teenagers command well-dressed and groomed middle-class professionals from Vastrapur, Memnagar, and Naranpura to drive hither and thither. Their actions do not seem coordinated. The middle-aged men in clean pants and shirts put their cell phones aside and steer their cars as directed. They look ridiculous in their submission to this arbitrariness. What appears like roadblocks at first are often really none, and in the end they let everyone pass through. The youngsters visibly enjoy the attention they receive, having created the street as a stage to perform presence and power.

At other places, traffic is actually diverted. It is unclear why and no one asks for the reason. I ask a two-wheeler next to us for an explanation, but he just smiles and shrugs, perhaps somewhat embarrassed. Another one laughs and says in English, “Welcome to India.” Bharat, Dipesh, and I finally reach the University and meet the assistant officer, the registrar, and his boss in a room dotted with pictures of Ambedkar. There will be no work today, they tell us. The entire rationale, they say, is simply to send people home. Residents of the city should stay home and not leave their houses. I am offered tea, a prelude to a lengthy and meandering discussion, but I tell Bharat that I do not want to waste much time and prepare to leave for the city. They all warn me about entering the old city. Every five minutes they get phone calls about the situation. They check the newspapers and flyers and pamphlets that small

boys dodging the chaotic traffic distribute at traffic stops. They say it is getting worse by the minute.

I try to talk about events with the registrar. Nothing will happen if one just does the right thing and stays away from the Muslims, he says, concluding our discussion. They advise me to stay at home and if asked not to answer with my real name. “Riots,” here, are a serious matter, they say. I should not worry, they console me, because after a few days of violence the animosities will be forgotten and all will be back to normal.

Bharat and I take our leave, on his motorbike. We pass a huge refrigerator in the middle of the road not far from Circuit House, now smashed and abandoned. Glass shards are everywhere, perhaps because it is so convenient to smash, as the breaking makes noise, and glass shatters into a thousand pieces. Fences, too, and vehicles, especially cars, are damaged. At one corner the insides of a car are ripped out as if gutted. Steering wheel, seats, and styrofoam lie scattered on the floor. Many small fires line the streets and people stand in clusters around them. Bharat picks up speed and it is hard to tell who is doing the damage and who is just watching. It is clear, though, that the street has become a stage for displaying damaged objects to block or slow down movement. The traffic is less chaotic now than in the morning, but a few obviously nervous people heading home from work gun their engines and drive recklessly. Later in the day, the noise lessened and the city became very quiet.

We approach the Shahibag Underbridge at the Calico Textile Museum with trepidation. From above stones have been thrown onto the street. Bharat points to a large blot of blood on the road. There are no police in sight, and, in fact we haven’t seen a single policeman all morning. We pass “*Vaji Ali*,” that adorns the middle of a

road. It is the last time I see this small Muslim structure, as it will mysteriously disappear on March 1.<sup>6</sup>

In its stead a makeshift Hanuman temple will be erected with the name “Godharia Hanuman Temple,” referring to the town of Godhra. That structure, too, will suddenly vanish. Finally, on March 8, the road is plastered with black tar allowing traffic to pass over the former saint’s tomb. Some drivers make sure to slow their vehicles down and spit *pan* (betel nut) on the fresh asphalt, others respectfully drive around it, or simply ignore the entire matter and treat the road simply as a road. Hanumanji, however, reappears off the road at the side, where yet another makeshift temple is erected with overly large colored poster copies of the God flaunted on the outside.

It is not even noon yet, and much has already happened. Bharat is afraid for his motorbike and wants to get home quickly. He refuses to cross any bridge again into East Ahmedabad or the old walled city. There is nothing to see, he tells me. Nothing. The youngsters that now rule the street are enforcing the *bandh*. He points out that all windows have their shutters closed, “honoring” the murdered Hindus of Godhra. Still, before departing, Bharat insists on taking *darshan* at the military camp, where a popular temple for the Hindu God Hanuman is located.<sup>7</sup>

We split. I continue on by foot on Ashram road all the way to Income Tax circle. At Gujarat Vidhyapit, a University founded by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920’s and known for its Peace Research Institute (*Ahimsa Sanshodhan*, literally the Non-Violence Research Institute), a cluster of people stare out from behind the large,

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<sup>6</sup>This is the *dargah* (tomb) of a Vali Gujarati, the 17<sup>th</sup> century grandfather (*dada*) of Urdu poetry known for his *ghazals* in Urdu then known as *Gujri*. He is considered one of the pioneers of the court language and some of his verses express deep longing and suffering of separation from Gujarat. Being a frequent visitor to Ahmedabad, part of the court of Sufi Saint Saiyad Shah Vajiuddin, he is believed to have died in the city.

<sup>7</sup>*Darshan* is a visit to a Guru or a temple, literally it means “seeing”. It is the most common worship Prtial in India, the seeing and being seen by the God or the Guru in a temple or Ashram. It is also used for visiting a teacher or any other figure of authority into whose presence one enters.

closed gates that are nearly always open. Now they are locked from the inside with surprisingly large chains. The people remind me of animals in a zoo. Or perhaps the other way around: They are looking in, and it is me who is in the zoo, with all the animals performing on Ashram road. Someone waves at me.

The Mahatma Gandhi statue at Income Tax Circle shows the Mahatma in 1930, with a stern marching pose on his way to Dandi in order to harvest the salt unfairly taxed by the British. The statue seems to run away from what it sees unfolding in the city. The plain Gandhi Bridge over the dust-dry Sabarmati, which leads into the Shahpur neighborhood of the old city, is half-closed. Orange colored plastic cubes are supposed to block the entrance, but some have been tipped over. Large stones have also been placed in the way. Several men in plain clothes talking loudly direct the two-wheelers as they approach.

At first I thought there were no policeman, but then realized that one is standing at the corner. He looks uninvolved. A cluster of scooters stand and make noise, their drivers wondering if, or if not, to go over the bridge. It's a strange scene as the two-wheelers roar their engines indecisively. I ask somebody what is going on and he shouts that I should go home. Only a couple of vehicles are moving to and from the other side. People shout to me and tell me not to go, to return, to go back. I should not cross onto the other side. They tell me it is all closed, all closed today.

I walk to the middle of Gandhi Bridge before reconsidering. Perhaps this is really not a good idea. With my camera I take a last picture of the old city from afar and then stuff it deep into my bag. Smoke is rising from several fires in the East. It appears in inverted pyramids, thin at the bottom but spreading over the sky to cover the diverse areas of the old city. Something in the old city is burning. I walk hesitantly toward it, over the bridge and directly into Shahpur, a district that is always tense since Muslim, Hindu and Jain communities border each other. I left my passport in my

apartment, and carry no identification with me. Having visited the Hanuman temple with Bharat several hours before, I believe I was still wearing a *tilak*, the Hindu dot or blessing on the forehead that one receives on visiting.

### 2.1.2 Contagion in Shahpur

I walk alone over the Mahatma Gandhi Bridge into Shahpur, a “sensitive area.” In Ahmedabad, districts where communal violence is likely to erupt receive this designation.<sup>8</sup> Within a few city blocks, I am in the middle of a peculiar scene. I quickly pass one, then two, then three, then four cars upended, set on fire, vigorously burning. Shops are ransacked and the street is full of dust and smoke. On one corner, in the safety of the charred ruins of a white Ambassador car, two policemen sit on a metal case, probably a box for cold drinks. Facing the bridge, their backs to the rampage behind them, they smoke *bidis* in silence. About twenty-five cows, large for a cluster of cows, linger around them, and the policemen seem intent on guarding them. They ignore me. Later I address them and they say, “All the city is like this now.” They do not tell me to go home but instead offer me a *bidi*. They tell me, “*under ma* (inside) it is even worse.” They are referring to the labyrinth of lanes in the old city center, the bowels of Ahmedabad.

I walk further up the road. People are on a rampage against all cars and scooters. Men run back and forth. I can see no Muslims, and in this sense I am reminded of the new city. Muslims, who make up a large part of the population of the East, have simply disappeared. But the cows have gathered in safe corners and are being guarded. Further ahead a crowd triumphantly attacks an unoccupied car.

Another car has been successfully mastered, turned over, the tires brightly aflame in a

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<sup>8</sup>At the time I did not know that the whole of central Gujarat, and especially the city of Ahmedabad, would see looting, killing, and rioting in a pogrom-like violence for days to come. I might not have set foot out of the house had I known the dimension of what I was to see in the next weeks. When I entered Shahpur it is because I thought this is where communal violence might happen. I still think it will be limited to the “usual areas,” like inner city areas.

jolly fire. Running feet, burning cars and scooters, jubilant noises. I am engulfed by smoke and dust.

I pass a panwalla's shop, supposedly closed and surrounded by many onlookers who watch the events in a seemingly relaxed manner. The shutters are down but the shop does offer pan and cigarettes for a higher than usual price, a typical conduct during curfew in the city. The higher risk for the shop owner to sell goods despite curfew and *bandh* translates into higher prices for the customer. People gather around, chew pan, and watch. A man who seems to be the shop owner waves at me and greets me with a smile. As they look at you people wiggle their heads in the typical affirmative unison. They talk about me but I don't understand what they are saying. I am afraid to draw too much attention but I wiggle back. I notice to my right a group of about ten policemen with water jugs, their rifles leisurely leaning against a brick wall. Some stand, others sit on blue plastic garden chairs under an open tent that protects them from the blazing sun. They silently watch the "car-killers," about 50-100 youngsters acting out their infantile aggressions. I position myself next to the police, just to be safe. Children bring instruments-- stones, bricks, plates, iron rods-- for the adolescents who are rioting. One policeman looks intently at me but remains completely silent. Perhaps he feels ashamed. I am almost always addressed, but they say nothing to me.<sup>9</sup>

The last car still alive is flipped over and set on fire, detonating a noiseless explosion and a short panic in the crowd. About twenty youths suddenly scurry away from the upended car and a burning liquid seeping from the car quickly follows them. The lower pants leg of one youth catch fire and he tries, first calmly but increasingly frantic, to put out the dancing flames while fleeing the car. People around him try to help put out the fire, and ultimately succeed, though I can see that his lower leg is

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<sup>9</sup>During the comparatively small Kargil riots in 1999, I had been able to communicate with policemen freely. But on this day, the police, although present, were obviously wanting to be elsewhere.



badly burned. Large light red spots speckle the tan skin of his leg. He limps away, and some people go with him. The policemen begin discussing what we had just seen. They comment on the fact that the car caught fire in an unexpectedly strong explosion. How foolish it is, they say, for untrained people to light the tank of a car without knowing how much fuel is in it.

In a building nearby, people, what seem to be children, are throwing stones onto another building. No one stops them. I want to cross the street and move closer to the buildings from which stones are thrown, but people start shouting at me as soon as I approach the street. Their attention takes me by surprise, as I thought I was successfully submerged into the other spectators in the crowd. One young man wearing a long red T-shirt with a metal rod in his hand immediately moves towards me. He says, almost politely, “You better go,” gesticulating towards Gandhi Bridge. It is clear that he does not think I belong here. I try to rejoin the policemen, who still just stare in absolute silence. Strange policemen, I think, as they don’t even tell me to leave.

Finally a middle-aged, clean-shaven and well-dressed civilian man appears, holding a cell phone. He acts with authority and, speaking only Hindi, unambiguously orders me to leave. His demeanor and clothing make me think that he is definitely as out of place in this part of the city as I am. He shouts to the youngsters to lead me away, but I indicate I’d rather leave alone. To my surprise, the rioting youths are more polite than he is, and they fortunately do not accompany me. I pass the people at the pan shop, who again smile and wiggle their heads. “*Saru chhe ne?*” (“It’s great, isn’t it?”). I circle back and turn around the left corner, passing the two smoking policemen again in order to reach a place from which better to see what the crowd was throwing stones at.

I enter another square in front of Shahpur Darwaja on Ring Road where an even larger audience with no policemen observes the attacking mob. Three shops are burning and the immense fire can be felt from the other side of the street. Nearby a street temple has also caught fire, and the white paint slowly turns dark. No one pays attention. Sitting on scooters and bicycles on the road a silent audience of perhaps fifteen to twenty people stare at the rampaging crowd. Some sit on newspapers placed on the pavement, others on their *rumal* (scarves). One man tells us, “They are all insured.” I ask if that is true and he says, “Yes, of course, they will all get money. They all left.”

From all sides people are throwing stones at a compound in front of us, from the roofs of adjacent houses, from the street, from behind a large tree decorated with hundreds of “Hindu” flags, which suggests there is another adjacent temple. I ask if there are any Muslims inside. Another man says, “They already left last night.” A man catches me by the arm telling me that, “There that is a Muslim building.” Those throwing stones are enthusiastic and excited, but there is no anger in the rioting crowd. I expected to see anger but I see only fun.

A newspaper seller (*chappawalla*) arrives with his bicycle. I buy one, sit with the others and begin skimming it. The thin Gujarati-language paper called the Western Times boldly announces the latest events: “In the city people are rioting.” It carries the headline “Frightened, Burning Gujarat” (“*Bhadake Baltu Gujarat*”) and spells out in great detail all the areas, districts, and sub-districts of the city as well as throughout central Gujarat where violence has broken out and curfews have been imposed. It says the entire Shahpur district, too, where we are sitting, is under curfew. But here we are, people are rioting right in front of us, and many people, including myself, buy a paper (less than five cents a paper) and turning our faces away from the

heat of the burning shops, start to read. No one seems to find this moment extraordinary.

The Gujarati print is hard to read in places because of its cheap quality. Words are smudged or parts are missing where the paper has been folded or crinkled. Almost half of the entire first page of the Western Times carries advertisements: a mouth freshener “*Must Vahar*” for “clean breath and lovely mood,” miraculous Ayurvedic capsules called “Big Body” that promise more bodily strength with only one capsule a day by increasing appetite and weight while simultaneously lessening physical fatigue (*bhuk vadhaare, vajan vadhaare, thak bhagaade*). An add for “breast cream” and “Only-me Spray” by Synthico Exports for multiple erections depicts a rare erotic scene of a man on top of a women in a suggestive pose (*jetli uttejnaa tetlij majaa vaaramvaar*). There is even an ad for the “Gujarat Police and Military Store” on the papers fourth and final page framed by a gun and a rifle on each side. The guns are explicitly praised for “*svarakshaN ane nishaan mate*,” that is, for self-defense and as symbol (ensign). After a pious introduction, “Jay Ramapir,” it advertises air-pistols and air-guns for 600 to 3400 Rupees. In brackets it says, “*license ni jarur nathi*” (no license required).

I ask a man sitting next to me to read the paper with me, but he had just bought a paper himself. He points to the burning shops in front of us and tells me in a flat tone, “This is what is happening.” He means, no need to read the newspaper because you can see in front of you what is happening. But then, I wonder why he bought a newspaper. The paper shows black-and-white photos of the bizarrely charred bodies in the burned-out S6 coach of Sabarmati Express. The front page and the last page show also riot scenes. But there are no people in the pictures. The streets are empty, as if no one is rioting, or everybody has already left the scene when the photographs

were taken. Strange, I think, as I watch the streets filled with rioters in front of me while the published pictures of those very streets omit the people.

Beside me a young man wearing blue jeans and an American sweatshirt sits on his scooter and silently stares at the burning shops. Through a hand gesture he asks to see the paper I had just bought. We talk. Rajan speaks Gujarati mixed with some weak English. He is a college student at a university in the other side of the city.<sup>10</sup> He talks of Ayodhya. They will build a temple there, he says, even though the Muslims are against it. I ask why the shops are attacked. “They are from the *musalmans*,” he says. “Muslims have attacked Hindus in Godhra,” he adds dispassionately. “That’s why these shops are being burnt. They have taken our women.” His manner is detached, unemotional, and he seems to be mouthing words rather than inhabiting the meanings of the words he is speaking. I ask him why the shop owners in Ahmedabad are responsible for the attacks on Hindus in Godhra. In lieu of an answer, Rajan simply takes my hand and says “Come, you want to see? Come on, I’ll show you.”

Leading me by the hand, we walk toward the burning shops where animated youths stand and throw stones. We pass the heat of two burned out shops in a little alleyway. Standing between the shops, the heat from the still glowing fires is so great that I have to cover my eyes. Rajan joins the others and starts throwing stones. Firing one after the other, he goes on the assault. But the stones are not directed to what is left of the shops. They land behind a high white wall along a small chawl (small road). I assume there are people there, but if so, they make no noise, there is no response. I feel embarrassed and somewhat ashamed, standing amidst people attacking a Muslim structure of worship.<sup>11</sup> Rajan wants me to throw but I simply turn around and leave. I do not know what to say. In retrospect, it seems as if Rajan, after

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<sup>10</sup> Often referred to as “Gujarezi,” a mix of Gujarati and *angrezi* (English).

<sup>11</sup> I thank Kristen Drybread, who perceptively reminded me, when I gave a short version of this at the 2004 AES meetings in Atlanta, that my embarrassment and shame stemmed from the fact, that I, too, was tempted for a moment to throw a stone. So much for the power of contagion.

seeing the photos, literally put himself in the picture, the empty picture of the newspaper. He looked at the empty rioting scenes and then took my hand and put us both in the picture. The Western Times not only informed the reader of what was happening, but it encouraged him to take part.

Confused, I walk back and position myself on a traffic island next to a blind and bearded old man who is squatting there silently, seemingly protected by another closed pan-shop. I am tempted to ask him if he is a Muslim, but I abstain in order not to frighten the man in case he is. Behind us is Shahpur Darwaja and its mosque, guarded by two policemen, who also buy a newspaper from the seller, again in order to read what they are looking at. It makes sense that the crowd would not attack this structure as behind the Shahpur Darwaja begins a Muslim majority residential area. And the Muslims of Shahpur would certainly try to retaliate. I wonder a moment why the police would guard what is not attacked.

The old man wears thick glasses, and it appears he cannot hear well. He is couched next to a huge block of ice covered with sheets, which provides some protection from the heat. In front of us we watch the breaking in and looting of three new shops on Ring Road at Maiya Fateh ni Chali. From the outside, there is nothing to suggest that these are Muslim shops. But in the crowd there are leaders, big men, men of the moment, who rush to specific shops and give signs with their hands for the others to come. The young men are secure and self-confident. They wear neither masks nor helmets.

The crowd manages to break open a beverage shop. Happily shouting at their accomplishment, they drink the soft drinks as if they had earned them following a hard day's work. They smash the empty bottles on the street. One boy opens a bottle with his teeth, knowing full well that we are all looking at him. He is on stage. In front of us is a garage shop called Nutan Tires. The men gesticulate and seem to know the

shop. They break open the door with a loud bang and many “Arrayyyss.” They use stones and steel lances to smash the locks of the gutters. The old blind man asks me which shop it is. I tell him “NutanTires.” I have to shout several times “Nutan tires, Nuutaan Tiiires!” until he gets it. He nods a “Muslim” as if understood. It is clear the shops are handpicked. The crowd selected only this shop, a Muslim shop, and not the shop to the right or to the left. Again I am offered a *bidi* but, ironically, we have no light despite all the fire in front of us.

The very first thing removed from Nutan Tires is a scooter, probably parked inside as a precaution. It is dragged out and lit on fire with great ceremony. Then one young man brings out a small stereo, a kind of ghetto-blaster. To my amazement they immediately smash the machine on the pavement, and keep slamming it down with large roundabout movements to make sure it gets completely destroyed. Several parts are picked up and smashed again and again. Aside from vehicles, ghetto blasters are the most sought-after objects of the young and poor working class. Next, a big red phone is being brought out and joyfully demolished, repeatedly throwing it to the ground until unrecognizable. Another man brings out a large mirror and triumphantly smashes it on the pavement. He steps on the glass shards with his thin sandals, startling me as I think he must be injuring himself. I see no anger, just excitement. The idea seems to be to make the items splatter in all directions. No one keeps any items. It is about destruction in a dramatic fashion. But if this is merely a performance, then who is the audience? The answer might turn out to be uncomfortable for me.

The small violent crowd finally leaves and disappears in an alley in the direction of Jayantilal Punjalal Marg. Their attention has gone elsewhere. A tribal woman (or perhaps *Vagri*) stands in front of the ransacked Nutan Tires shop and watches in fascination. Suddenly a burning scooter makes a loud bang. A policeman

approaches her and scolds her for standing so close to the burning vehicle. He tells her to move on. An armored police van appears and we all have to run for cover as it shoots water and tears gas chaotically in all directions. Still wondering why the police target us (the spectators) instead of the armed bands of rioting youth, I get tears gas in my eyes. I end up in some Vagri mohalla with narrow lanes and masses of people pushing in.

We all rest there. Some women are closing their shutters and shops as we all move away from the spreading tear gas. Men and women are distributing iced water in the heat. People stare at me. I feel I am out of place. Without much ado they show me the way out, roughly, and with hubris. I leave the narrow lane in a hurry but outside of the lane three women approach me, stop me, and tell me, “Do not leave, why do you leave, fight for us!” The Vagri women smile and have an interesting collection of dots on their faces and decorations on hands and feet. They address me jokingly, as if they are openly flirting with me. They ask where I am from and what I do here. I tell them I am German but I live in Naranpura. After some discussion, and with the usual amazement that I actually do speak Gujarati, they agree that I should leave. They smile mockingly, and before they let me go they make me say “Jai Sitaram.”<sup>12</sup>

I hurry back over Gandhi Bridge into West Ahmedabad, wary of the police van behind me. Two boys stop me and introduce themselves. We had “lots of fun,” they say, expecting I would agree. With watering and hurting eyes from the teargas, one tells me that I should take him to “this Jarmany.” He wants to study German and live in Bangalore. Both show no fear and I am amazed how aloof they are from all that is

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<sup>12</sup>The scenes described above take place around Kajimia no Tekro opposite of Chishti Chamber, and later Maiya Fateh ni Chali opposite Shahpur Darwaja on the main street coming from Gandhi Bridge (on the Ring Road). The Vagri *nez*, in which I found refuge from the police van is next to Shankar Bhavan.

happening all around us. I ask them why no one is afraid. Isn't this supposed to be a riot? Where are the Muslims?

They tell me that Muslims are hopelessly outnumbered. There will be stabbings soon, they add, and the police will fire real bullets at some point in the future to stop the rioting. But today, there is no real danger.<sup>13</sup> I ask why all this is necessary. The older of the two does not mention the Godhra incident or the Ayodhya agitation but simply says, "This is what we do here once a year." Seeing my astonishment with the answer he tells me that Muslims have abducted "pretty Hindu girls" in Godhra. He stresses that they were "very pretty girls," as if that would make the abduction worse.

Tired from the burning sun and sated by the things I had seen, I return to the new city. I walk back over the deserted Gandhi Bridge, enter Ambavadi, and finally arrive home to Naranpura in the late afternoon. The streets are clean and calm. Naranpura is a middle-class district and considered a "good area." Higher classes appreciate that this area is absolutely "safe" for Hindus as there are no Muslims around, while members of lower classes and castes who are able to live or work there praise what they call having "full facility": the availability of jobs, water, electricity, eateries, and public services, made possible through the financial clout of the middle classes.

Some houses have gardens with rare grass and trees in front of them, but many have some kind of fence, often barbed wire, protecting them from the public. At first I was puzzled by the use of barbed wire in residential as well as public areas in

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<sup>13</sup>This anticipates later developments. Just a few days later, walls and boards in Ahmedabad will be painted with "*e to ander ki baat hai, Modi sarkaar hamare saath hai*." ("It is an open secret, the Modi government is with us"). These scribbles will remain for months to come. Muslim residents in Ahmedabad will repeat them to me again and again to communicate their fear and feeling of helplessness in the present condition. They also appear in slight variations. Compare for example, "*andar ki baat hai, police hamare saath hai*" ("It is an open secret that the police is on our side") mentioned in R.N. Sharma's "Gujarat Holocaust," p. 211. Some but not all of these scribbles will be removed shortly before the election in December 2002.



Ahmedabad . Coming from Berlin, I always associated barbed wire with the Allied Force's quarters and the Wall. But in Ahmedabad it is around green areas that barbed wire is used incessantly. Be it in the private garden before a house, or public green spaces, barbed wire protects any piece of plant-life--flower, bush, grass, or tree--from the ubiquitous cows, goats, and buffaloes as well as from the squatting migrant workers who search for soft and shady areas to set up their temporary dwellings. This makes many areas look as if they are always under construction, waiting to be completed by a fence or wall to keep animals and humans out. The barbed wire is not temporary, however, but permanent, and it can be dangerous.

Ironically near Ashram Road just opposite the famous Gandhi Navjivan Press where I lived for several months, there was a small, enclosed green space with a sitting-bench in the middle right in front of my balcony not larger than the size of four cars parked side to side. But no one ever sat on the bench as the barbed wire surrounded the green space so completely that not only no cow could reach the grass, but also no resident could sit on the bench. At least the grass and bush showed a rare beautiful lushness.

The streets in Ambavadi are well kept are relatively empty except for some pan shops that stay open for the desperately addicted pan chewers always weary of the RSS. People on the street speak to me, they ask me "How is India today?" or "Do you like Amdavad today?" and "Isn't it crazy?"<sup>14</sup> Despite the riots in the East, the killing, burning, and looting, there is an air of celebration in the new city.

The walk though Naranpura back home in the late afternoon is idyllic. I notice that I have slowed down my walking pace. There is no noise or dust and one can

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<sup>14</sup>"Amdavad" is colloquial spelling for Ahmedabad and indicates the local pronunciation of the city's name, (not be confused with the posh Ambavadi area of Ahmedabad). Most residents of the city refer to it as "Amdavad." This spelling circumvents and obscures the very Muslim nature of the city's name. Many new signs on the highways around the city are spelled "Amdavad" in Gujarati, whereas the boards in train stations are in Hindi and carry mostly the more formal "Ahmedabad."

actually enjoy the trees, the singing of the birds, and the warm climate. The silence and the fact that the new city suddenly appears to me as dust-free makes this walk the most enjoyable I can recall through West-Ahmedabad. In the midst of mayhem, for the first time I actually felt the city to be livable and relaxed. I catch myself in the perversion of the situation.

But I am not the only one. In parts of Naranpura and Ambawadi, I see married couples sitting on their garden swings (*hitchko*), enjoying the calmness of the day. The swing used to be a symbol of royalty in Gujarat and is the pride of every garden of middle-class houses in Ahmedabad. It is also the symbol of Krishna, the deity, and is swung as worship during the Krishna festival (Janmashtami), which celebrates the incarnation as Bal Krishna, the God Krishna as a child, lying in a swing (cradle). In popular *bhajans* (devotional songs) of the immensely popular Goddess Amba Mata, she is also sometimes depicted on a swing. Swings are not only used in gardens, but also multi-story apartment houses, where each family often has swings in the stairways behind the door grills. It is common to see elderly married couples on the swing in middle class homes in the late afternoon or evening, enjoying the cool breeze before going to bed. While during the day of the 28<sup>th</sup> the old city, East Ahmedabad, was a scene of utter mayhem, in the idyllic districts of Naranpura and Ambavadi of West Ahmedabad I found contented couples rhythmically swaying back and forth to the strange sound of the squeaking metal of a swing.

### 2.2.2 The poisonous lizard and mad Muslim women

In the evening after dinner, while Bharat and I discuss what has happened in the city all day, our other roommate, Pratab, receives a phone-call from a relative of his village. His voice becomes intense and fearful. He hangs up and tells us the news: Between 9 and 11 o'clock in the morning while Bharat and I were sipping tea with the registrar at Ambedkar University, a group of *muslim strio* (Muslim women), veiled

completely in black, entered the bazaar of Mandal, a small town with a slight Muslim majority. All the vendors viewed them curiously as they walked by. When they reached the center of the bazaar, the women suddenly pulled *talwaro* (swords) out from under their robes and started to beat the Hindus, all the while shouting “*Allahu Akbar*.” The vendors quickly fled into their shops and closed the doors firmly to escape the bloody butchery (*katleam*).

Pratab emphasizes that these women had secretly managed to bring extra sharp *talwals* right into the middle of the peaceful bazaar of the small town, hidden under their black *burqa* (female Muslim veil). This has provoked a major uprising in Mandal Pratab ends his story. My roommates explain to me that in towns like Mandal with a slight Muslim majority, the Hindus are made to suffer like in *juna shaher ma* (in the walled city) or in Pakistan. Mandal lies 3 kilometers from Vaghada, Bharat’s home village, and a few kilometers from Malanpur, Pratab’s home village. People around Vaghada and Malanpur responded by getting out their guns (*banduk*) in case they were needed.

Many times in Ahmedabad I heard stories involving the fantasy of the black *burqa* of Muslim women, and the many secrets possibly hiding beneath it, always elaborated as if irrefutable fact. In the long curfew hours during frequent bouts of communal violence, police often only allow female residents to move about in order to replenish food supplies. Many Ahmedabad residents in the old and new city told me they believe that Muslim women use the *burqa* during curfews to arm the Muslim community secretly. They are said to smuggle under their robes the typical assortment of weaponry regularly used for urban violence, like acid bulbs, guns, and knives. Sometimes the stories include the accusation that criminals dress as *burqa* clad Muslim women to escape the police. In these tellings, it is never addressed how the

other communities arm themselves, which would implicate Hindus, too, in communal violence, since they also use the same assortment of weapons.

As in the case of the Sandesh reportage in the next chapter, the evocativeness of this cliché does not necessarily limit itself to the Hindu communities. A close Muslim friend told me the “true” story of the assassination of an underworld don in Shah Allam several years ago that caused an uproar within the local Muslim communities. The assassins were men wearing black *burqas* dressed as women pretending to gather together near a shrine. This pretense enabled them to approach the powerful don and his entourage and come close enough to kill him.

The use of veiling to conceal identity and create anonymity is not, however, a source of fantasy only with reference to Muslim women and communal violence. Because of the pollution caused by Ahmedabad’s everyday traffic, young female drivers on two-wheelers carefully shield their faces with colorful scarves (*rumals*) and long white gauntlets. When driving with scooters to school most female college students, for example, veil and hide their bodies and faces, which then becomes a source of many male fantasies. Asking unmarried female college students why they veil in such a manner, I always got the same answer: besides filtering out dust and heat, it also protects them from male gazes. It protects them against “eve-teasing” and male curiosity. One college professor in Baroda offered another opinion: young women choose to veil in traffic because they do not want to be recognized when they engage in illicit relations with boys.

Initially I try to joke about Pratab’s story of panic, but Bharat has already dialed the number of one of the few phones in his home village. They tell him they have not heard this story, and his home village is peaceful. This is the first of many such rumors that I will hear in the months to come. While I am highly skeptical of most of these rumors, Bharat and Pratab take them dead seriously. The fact that all of

these stories turn out to be *bakwas* (nonsense) does not interest Pratab or Bharat and has no effect. The point is, they say, the rumors could have been true. There is always the possibility (*hoy shaake*) that the enemy is planning, doing, and scheming. The force of these rumors does subside eventually, not by disproof, however, but by simply losing interest in them. The rumor about violence in Mandal turns out to be prescient, however, as Mandal does see violence in the following weeks.

Later that evening, Bharat returns to the question of what I had seen during the day and pays unusual attention to the details. He inquires specifically about the neighborhood, in which I found refuge from the tear gas of the police. When I tell him about my encounter with members of Ahmedabad's Vagri community, he makes a disgusted face and says they are considered low caste (*halka loko*).<sup>15</sup> They are not merely *halka loko*, he says in English, but "*very very low people*." Bharat considers himself something better than these Vagri, a member of the Naroda branch of the *Rajput*, claiming Kshatriya status. Many people would tacitly disavow his claim to this varna status, and simply call him upon his surname, *Jadav*, which in central Gujarat indicates membership in the "other backward classes" (OBC), often associated with Shudra status.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>In GED *vaaghri* is translated as "man of Vaaghri caste; [fig.] dirty, rude, and mannerless" and the corresponding *vaagharan* as "woman of Vaaghri caste; wife of a Vaaghri; [fig.] slovenly woman, slut." Pocock (1973:30, and glossar) mentions the *vaaghari* as hunters, fowlers and their association with filthiness. According to Werth (1996:57pp.), who researched Vagri groups in Tamil Nadu and alludes to the closeness of their language to Gujarati, Vagri claim their name to derive from the term *vaag*, tiger. Vaagri then means "like a tiger." In Gujarati *vaagh* means "a ferocious man," besides "tiger." It also denotes "a mortgage" and "a slave girl; a maid servant" (TMGED). Others claim the name Vagri comes from the Gujarati term *vaghur*, which means "net." The Sanskrit *vagura* means "net or trap for animals," and the Marathi *vaghri*, "living by snaring birds and beasts" (Werth 1996:58).

<sup>16</sup>Bharat uses here the very same mechanism by which his own community is subjected to stigmatization. He externalizes his own "lowness" by projecting it onto the Vagri (in other moments it is the Thakor or the Muslim). Others consider him a "rough fellow," member of a backward and uneducated community, consuming too much *tel* (groundnut oil) in his food which makes him *tamasi*, with *majli aakh* (brutish eyes), and someone "not to be trusted," even if "polished" by education. These are all qualifications that classmates, colleagues, and even his professors at GU have told me about him in his absence. Blissfully unaware or perhaps in denial of these opinions, Bharat here externalizes and projects onto the Vagri what he so tragically himself is caught up in.

Most Gujaratis--Hindu, Muslim, and Jain--speak with contempt about the *Vagri*, who are believed to indulge in “dirty practices” such as meat eating, alcohol consumption, and animal sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> I ask Bharat why he thinks the *Vagri* community participates with other communities who dislike them in attacking Muslim buildings or neighborhoods, when they share with Muslims an undesirable status. Instead of an answer, however, Bharat just smiles and tells me a *kahevat* (saying)<sup>18</sup> about *Vagris*, a “typical saying,” he recites, “*Gho marvani tay, tyare Vagri vadhe jay*,” (“Once the poisonous lizard is killed, then the *Vagri* move on.”)<sup>19</sup>

### 2.2.3 Killing indiscriminately

Restless later that evening, I go out to buy cigarettes. It is already after midnight, so all the shops around my apartment are closed. For the first time I hear the camel in front of my apartment building making funny noises, of a kind that only sleeping camels make. Everyday I have seen this camel, which belongs to a local Rabari family, pulling a large cart, but I never listened to the noise it makes in sleep. It has found a sort of refuge between white middle class apartment buildings, which are enclosed in upscale stone and metal fences facing exposed open railways lines. The man of the family drives a large orange truck, owned by some company, which he parks safely under my balcony every night and in which part of his family sleep.

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<sup>17</sup>Throughout rural Gujarat Vagri women are known for their “fatal seductive powers” and occasional magical spells. Perhaps the reason is that the women indeed have a tendency to flirt openly with strangers, an uncommon experience in prudish Gujarat. In Ahmedabad most Vagri sell vegetables on street *larris* (lorries). Early in the morning they will roll into middle class areas and late at night roll back to the cheaper quarters in East Ahmedabad. Known for their seductive sexual powers meant that any reference to their astonishing flirtatious nature on my side was always accompanied by a warning that any amorous affair would end in a deadly disaster.

<sup>18</sup>*kehvu* is ‘to say,’ *vat* is speech, *kehvāt* is an “it-is-said or a “something-said,” that is, a saying, a proverb.

<sup>19</sup>When I ask Bharat to explain the saying to me, he tells me “*gho*” was a “*pankhio*.” *Pankhi* means bird (*pankhiu* means “winged”), but *pankhi no melo* also can mean a group or gathering that will disband after a short time. I believe Bharat simply made a mistake here and thinks *gho* is some kind of a bird, whereas it is actually a poisonous lizard (an iguana).

I no doubt notice the camel's sounds because of the absence of the ubiquitous barking of dogs. Throughout the pogroms, this unusually loud city is characterized by a deep silence. I search for a panwalla that I know at a street corner where two-wheelers meet for smoking, chewing pan, and debate. Nearby is a local sandwich stand where youths meet at night. I want to hear some more about the day's events, as I can't wait to read the newspaper in the morning. But only three blocks from my apartment, I realize that it is not just my immediate neighborhood, but the entire area that is deadly silent.

At the Naranpura railways crossing, at least three trains pass every evening, tooting dreadfully loud horns without respite and slicing the late night into segments, those before and after the trains. They come and go slowly to avoid hitting the humans, cows, and dogs that cross the tracks in the dark. But tonight not a single train is running. The silence makes me uncomfortable, but I also feel foolish because I usually complain bitterly to my roommates about the noise.

I run into two youngsters who are smoking and ask them where I can find an open panwalla. They are startled to see me on the street. The one boy, slightly overweight, with a clean shirt, neatly tucked in, is clearly middle-class; the other, thin, dark, and shorter, is definitely not--his T-shirt is dirty, and not tucked in, his hair cut poorly and unkempt. They both smell of alcohol. Quite an odd pair, I think, in a city obsessed with boundaries.

The thin one responds, in a bossy and impolite tone, that I should not be out here. This is not a night to walk around. But I live here, I say, astonished by his aggressive tone. He points at me and says again, "Do not promenade around here like this." "No walking," he adds in English. The middle-class boy remains silent. It is on my own "*jokam*" (risk) he says, if I walk today, and he repeats in English, "at your

own *riks*.” He says “riks” instead of risk. I say, “I am just on the way to a panwalla. Isn’t this, after all, Naranpura, a safe area?”

“No!” he retorts, and mumbles in Gujarati to his friend something about what a fool I am (*pagal manaas*). “Everything is closed now. “Everything” (*badu bandh chhe j. Badu j.*). I point to his cigarette and, seeing my gesture, he hands me his lighted one. The gesture surprises me, as strangers usually do not share used cigarettes. I want to hand it back after a drag but he indicates I should keep it, which I did not expect. I feel ashamed. Again he tells me that I should go home. I might get hurt. There are people all over who stab and attack indiscriminately. His unexpected patience with me counters his bossy behavior. I sense some sincere concern for my safety. No one is there to help me, he says. I am alone. I should go home.

His words ring in my ears as I walk back. I have the impression that, when he said “they kill indiscriminately” he meant, “we kill indiscriminately today.” It was a personal warning. Later, I discover that in this first day and night alone, 235 Muslims were reported killed in central Gujarat, 176 alone in Ahmedabad.

## 2.3 *Jai Shri Ram* and the dance of death

### 2.3.1 Gulbarg Society

While I was walking in the idyllic middle class areas in Ambavadi and Naranpura, recovering from Shahpur and enjoying the clean air and the eerie silence of the afternoon and evening, systematic killing was being carried out elsewhere in the city. In the first few days the center of the pogroms was *not* in the old city, where I had ventured expecting to witness “communal violence” at one of the traditional trouble spots like Shahpur gate. What I got to see at the border to Shahpur was short of anything like a “riot,” but a strange festival of sorts of one community in the absence of the other, while the police guarded cows, discussed the dangers of lightning



a vehicle, and read in newspapers, what they were witnessing. Areas within the inner city of Ahmedabad are often referred to by making use of a mental geography of violence, with at times flexible boundaries respective of the speaker. Residents from within and from without label street corners and areas as “dangerous” or “mixed,” as “Muslim” or “Hindu” respectively.

Muslim communities in Shahpur, Raikhad, Raipur, Khadia, Kalupur, Dariapur, Jamalpur, Khanpur and elsewhere were attacked in the following days and weeks to be sure. But, initially, the worst organized violence took place where Muslim residents were hopelessly outnumbered or where they consisted of Muslim migrant communities from outside the state, not well connected to local Muslim networks. After the first few days of pogroms, a pattern became visible where the highest number of killings took place in Meghani Nagar, Naroda, Odhav, Amraiwad, Bapunagar and Gomptipur, all areas far beyond the city walls at the fringes in East Ahmedabad.

These areas have ever been exactly “peaceful” or harmless before, but the odd discrepancy between the official designation of inner city areas as “highly sensitive,” and the sheer enormity in size and determination of the attacks elsewhere, leaving behind an unequal death toll was widely ignored in media analyses, which kept on reporting events by reference to “communalism,” “communal flare-ups,” and “communal clashes” in the city between equal groups of miscreants (in the English as well as Gujarati vernacular press). There is a simple reason why the traditional trouble spots within the walled city saw comparatively less violence in the initial days.

In a notable exception to the omission of this curious fact, a reporter of the Times, Anil Pathak, remarks, on March 3, 2002, four days into the violence, “Thickly-populated areas like Kalupur, Dariapur, Jamalpur and Raipur and Khadia remained relatively trouble free this time accounting for only six out of staggering 320 deaths

that have taken place over the last four days. (...). While the communally volatile walled city areas have sizable population of both communities sharing space, there is also mutual respect for each others strengths, than in areas where one or the other community is hopelessly outnumbered and targeting them was easy for the mobs. (...). Perhaps for the first time in the history of communal flare-ups in Ahmedabad, it is not the walled city areas which are on the news for all the wrong reasons.”<sup>20</sup>

Pathak painfully misses the chance to draw the obvious and simple conclusion out of this fact, that is, that what he is witnessing is precisely not “communal violence” at all, that is groups clashing all over the city in fierce combat, but a pogrom acted out right in front of his eyes. It is important to keep this discrepancy between “sensitive area” and collective massacre in mind when we now turn to two of several gory sights of incredible violence on this very same day that I described above in Shahpur.

One of the areas where the systematic slaughter was carried out was the residential colony called “Gulbarg society” in the northeastern district of Chamanpura south of the Civil Hospital. “Gulbarg society” is a compound enclosed by a stone wall with metal gates, part of a small middle-class colony situated on the Naroda railway line, but encircled by the neighborhoods of Patrawali Chali and Dhupsing ni Chali, both listed as “slum areas” in the Ahmedabad Setu City map. On the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> it resembled a battlefield. The residential complex contains nineteen blocks, eight buildings, and 55 tenements. The attacks on its residents began at 10:30 am.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Times of India, March 3, 2002, p. 12, “*Thank God the walled city is quiet*,” by Anil Pathak.

<sup>21</sup>The following account is based on several sources: Concerned Citizens Tribunal (CCT), *Crime Against Humanity. An Inquiry into the Carnage in Gujarat*. Vol I/II. Ahmedabad: Anil Dharkar for Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2002; Human Rights Watch (HRW), “We Have No Orders to Save You,” *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*, 14 (3) (C), April 2002; several personally copied affidavits of witness and survivor accounts given in relief camps; *Communalism Combat* (GG), *Genocide, Gujarat 2002*. Javed Anand and Teesta Setalvad (ed.), Year 8, No. 77-78, 2002. Mumbai: Sabrang Communications. It should be understood that this account based on reports, eye witness accounts, and affidavits is an attempt to offer the reader some approximate idea what happened in Gulbarg society on this day. Inconsistencies and omissions are due to the confusing

Already at 7:30 am, crowds had gathered around the entire Chamanpura region between Asarva Talav and Civil Hospital. A police force arrived at around 4:30 PM, by which time everything was over. For a full six hours, the colony was left to defend itself.<sup>22</sup>

The killings began in the morning, with the imposition of a *bandh* by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Residents reported seeing six or seven people in the early morning forcing shops to close and physically attacking them in the neighborhoods surrounding the colony. Concerned parents summoned back home children taking early tuition classes in the middle-class colony. Hearing of the *bandh*, panic-ridden Muslim residents from neighboring *chawls* sought refuge in Gulbarg, especially appealing to Ehsan Jaffri for help.

Ehsan Jaffri is a former trade unionist and a current Congress Party member of Parliament (MP), and a Muslim. Despite the fact that everyone knew that Jaffri had campaigned against Narendra Modi in the Rajkot by-elections just five days before, Muslim residents in that area felt it safer to be close to “*sa’ab*,” a “*mota manas*” (big man) who had connections. In a speech in Rajkot, Ehsan Jaffri had openly encouraged residents not to vote for Modi because he was an RSS man. Despite heightened tensions between Hindus and Muslims in recent years, he and his family remained in Gulbarg, in what some consider a “dangerous area.” They resisted the trend of well-to-do Muslims to escape to all-Muslim areas or minimally to one of the middle-class neighborhoods in West-Ahmedabad.

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nature of the incident and the fact that it was not immediately investigated into by professionals for such matters.

<sup>22</sup>According to the FIR (First Information Report) filed by KG Erda, senior inspector of the Meghaninagar police station, in the early morning at 7:00 o’clock am, the Meghani police station got the order to arrange *bandobast* (literally, alertness, watchfulness) in the entire area at Chamanpura Chakla, Dhupsingh Chali, Ratnanagar Char rasta, Ramannagar new crossing, Meghani nagar bus stand, New Menta Bari, Meena Bazaar, Rashmi nagar society as well as at Gulbarg society. At that point shops were already attacked, looted, and burnt. According to this report, the police was unable to disperse the crowd. The incident carried on until 7:00 pm. The complaint was filed approximately two hours later, at 8:45 pm.

This attack was not the first on this isolated Muslim compound that borders working class areas, abandoned mills, and lower class Hindu homes. Gulbarg had also burned during the 1969 riots, and in several of the communal conflagrations in the interim decades. Usually, trouble in Gulbarg seemed to spread all over Chamanpura into the neighboring Asarva district. This time however, the attacks “zeroed in on this society.”<sup>23</sup>

The published affidavits of survivors, eyewitness accounts, and the numerous analytic reports, give the impression that the hours long siege of the colony was carefully considered and planned. When early morning crowds gathered in the open streets, there were few attacks on Muslim communities in the vicinity. There seem to have been no or very few of the typical stray stabbing incidences that characterize Ahmedabad’s violence regularly in later phases of communal violence. On the contrary, it seems that the threat intended was only intimidation, to convince several Muslim residents in the area to not wander outside of the Gulbarg colony.

At 10:30 am Ahmedabad police commissioner Pandey, after a telephone call from Ehsan Jaffri, visited the colony together with Congress officials Ambalal Nadia and Kannulal Solanki. The police commissioner gave the MP personal assurances in front of several witnesses that reinforcements would be sent and that he would be fully protected. Human Rights Watch cites a forty-five year-old witness, “They [the residents] wanted to leave by the railroad behind Jaffrey’s house, but the police commissioner said, ‘No, don’t you trust me? You must stay here.’”<sup>24</sup> The Concerned Citizen’s Tribunal also cites several eyewitnesses that saw the police commissioner arriving and talking to Jaffri, “He [the PC] said to Jaffri, ‘We are making all arrangements for you and sending additional police force – you don’t worry.’ Jaffri

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<sup>23</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>HRW, p. 20.

*sa'ab* told Pandey *sa'ab*, 'If you cannot make arrangements for us and if you don't have enough men, then arrange for us to go away from here—just let us know.'"<sup>25</sup>

Those not acquainted with the communal realities of Ahmedabad might easily conclude that the residents of Gulbarg simply miscalculated the seriousness of the situation. They were, however, in no way naïve about the dangers at hand. All those who have lived in Ahmedabad knew quite well that this was going to be a dangerous day. They knew that, as in past communal trouble, the day would end with several Muslim and Hindu deaths. It is important to understand that Jaffri trusted his own experiences as well as the assurances of the police commissioner. He had invested in the colony rather idealistically over many years, culminating now in the triumph of the opposite of what Jaffri had always believed. He expected the usual incidence of spontaneous and partly instigated violence. And he was perfectly aware that if an organization like the Bajrang Dal or the VHP were to launch a frontal attack on Gulbarg, the colony would be defenseless without police help.

Just a few minutes after the police commissioner left, the Zahir Bakery and an auto-rickshaw directly outside the complex were set on fire. Within minutes a large mob had gathered. An eyewitness and survivor told Human Rights Watch, "At 10:30 am the stone throwing started. First there were 200 people then 500 from all over, then more. (...). We threw stones in self-defense. They had swords, pipes, soda-lemon bottles, sharp weapons, petrol, kerosene, and gas cylinders. They began shouting, '*Maro, kato,*' [Kill them, cut them] and '*Mian ko maro.*' [Kill the Muslims]. I hid on the third floor."<sup>26</sup>

The first FIR (First Information Report) filed by KG Erda, a senior inspector of the Meghaninagar police station, estimated the initial crowd at the Gulbarg colony to be as large as 20,000 to 25,000. Other reports as well as the press report numbers like

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<sup>25</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>HRW, p. 18.

15,000, 10,000 or 5,000. It then continued gathering force, coming from all directions, especially from Om Nagar Chakla Road and Meghani Nagar. According to the initial police report, however, it became a “huge crowd” only around 13:30. People carried *talwars* (swords), *lakdis* (wooden sticks), pipes and kerosene.

According to the KG Erda report, the police shot tear gas to disperse the crowd, but that only incited them to throw stones back at the policemen. “The mobs had put obstruction on the roads and were looting the shops. We let off tear gas and warnings, we even *lathi*-charged but the crowd was ‘possessed’ and shouting ‘*Jai Shri Ram*.’”<sup>27</sup>

According to the Concerned Citizen’s Tribunal, the Gulbarg colony itself was stoned within 5 minutes after the police commissioner had left. Soon after that, acid bulbs, bottles, burning cloth balls, petrol bombs, and stones were thrown from the backside into the complex. Soon objects were thrown from all sides, resulting in a continuous melee, injuring countless residents and setting fire to all houses. The mob also started to haul lit cycle tires taken from the Muslim “Ankur Cycles” shop opposite the colony.

At the entrance to the colony is a house with a terrace with a full view over the entire compound. It belonged to a “Hindu,” Dayaram Mochi and his family, who fled the scene in the morning.<sup>28</sup> Originally a small house, two stories were added in recent years. Its terrace became a platform for deadly attacks on Gulbarg residents. It is unclear precisely how the crowd seized the premises to have perfect access to the rest of the colony. The Concerned Citizen’s Tribunal met with Dayaram Mochi and his wife, who reported that the crowd gathered around 9:00 am and looted their house. As Hindus, they were allowed to leave safely. They gathered their grandchildren and fled

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<sup>27</sup>GG, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup>A *mochi* is traditionally a leather worker, a cobbler. The animal has been skinned already by a *chamaar* beforehand. The status of a *mochi* is considered “low” (*halku, nich*), but above *bhangi* (cleaner) or *chamaar* (skinner, tanner).

to a nearby school. They claimed to have lived for many years on good terms with their Muslim neighbors.

There are some twists, however, in the Mochi story. For one, two of the three Mochi sons are policemen and were on duty that day in Shahpur and Dariapur. Then also, the Mochis testified that initially they saw only four or five policemen, and that police vans arrived with reinforcements much later, and when they arrived, they took chairs from the Mochi home to sit and watch the rampage. And finally, the Mochis claim not to have recognized *any* of the many assailants despite the fact that we know from Muslim survivors that many neighbors were involved in the attacks. There is little doubt that the Mochi family feared serious consequences if they would identify neighbors and other perpetrators. Yet, the Tribunal reports that during the initial stone throwing Mr. Mochi actually encouraged the mob to enter the compound and shouted that there were very few Muslims inside.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever the actual role of the Mochis, from the terrace of their house, big boulders and many stones were thrown. According to the assessment of the Tribunal, this caused the greatest damage because the attacks came now from *within* the colony itself. The few Muslim men were now unable to effectively protect the gates and compound walls. Without the terrace, the residents might have been able to protect themselves.<sup>30</sup> The attacks continue until 1:00-1:15 pm. In at least one affidavit an eyewitness claims that from the terrace itself a policeman fired a gun at the residents. Meanwhile, residents ran out of water, hence the fires within the buildings could not be put out. Someone had apparently emptied the water tanks of Jaffri's house and garden. At 1:00 pm, Yusuf, one of the residents of the colony, was caught, cut to pieces, and torched--in full view of the horrified residents. The crowd then started shouting "*ghusi jao*" (get in) and the gate in the rear end of the compound was finally

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<sup>29</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 31.

broken down around 2:30- 2:45 pm. By that time nearly eighty persons found refuge in Jaffri's house, hoping it would withstand the attack for the longest time and waiting desperately for the police to arrive. Other residents holed up elsewhere in the complex. All reports and affidavits describe the following scenes as total mayhem.

Those Muslims who remained in the compound courtyard to fight off the attackers eventually tried to flee in desperation to some of the houses, most of which were already on fire, while being pursued and hacked to pieces by an incoming crowd. Many women and children hid in the burning apartments on the first floor and watched their relatives downstairs being killed. From below, the crowd first launched kerosene soaked cloth balls and then burning tires against the windows of occupied apartments. Women inside frantically threw the burning tires back, singeing their hands in the act. They hurled carpets and other objects out of the windows to prevent the encroaching fire from engulfing them. The mob caught one female resident, but a neighbor spontaneously and courageously claimed that she was not a Muslim. Declaring her a Hindu servant held against her wishes, she was saved. Once outside of the inferno the woman tries to return to save her children, but the man who intervened on her behalf begged her not to return as that would mean the mob would kill both of them.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on this stage of the massacre, the initial police report alleged "private firing" by Muslims. Chief Minister Narendra Modi picked up on this in a statement on March 1, 2002, referring to Gujarati newspaper reports of incidences of private firing at Gulbarg society in previous years. At Gulbarg, he argued, "things went out of control" only *after* Ehsan Jaffri chose to fire into the crowd. The mysterious references to "previous incidents" of "private firing" at Gulbarg society undoubtedly intended to invoke the specter of Islamic terrorism, the idea that there is a

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<sup>31</sup>This incident is also reported in Rakesh Sharma's documentary "Final Solution, 2004.



weapons cache somewhere in Gulbarg's colony. The Gujarati newspapers had indeed referred to the 1992 riots after the demolition of the Babri Masjid when Ehsan Jaffri had fired into the air with a private revolver to disperse an attacking crowd. Only in doubt was whether Jaffri had used his revolver this time also. Witnesses interviewed by Concerned Citizen's Tribunal deny this firmly. Not only did Jaffri never use a gun—neither into the air nor into the crowd, they state, but he actually telephoned and talked to the Chief Minister himself, a fact that Modi conveniently ignored in his statements. According to a close witness of Jaffri, Jaffri received a “callous response” from Modi, after which he lost all hope.<sup>32</sup>

By the time the back gate was broken down, Ehsan Jaffri had reportedly made several dozen or more phone calls including to the Chief Minister, to other VIPs, to the Home Minister Gordon Zaphadia, and numerous increasingly urgent calls to the police commissioner Pandey. Jaffri even arranged per phone for a fax calling for help to be sent to Sonia Gandhi in Delhi. Between 2:00-2:30 pm his phone was suddenly disconnected. At 2:45 pm all hope had vanished for the besieged residents. Now it had become just a matter of short time until all defenses would fall. In a last desperate attempt to save at least the remaining survivors of the colony, Ehsan Jaffri surrendered himself. For hours the crowd had targeted his home specifically and shouted for him to come out. One of the survivors, incidentally a Parsi, witnessed the last moments of MP Ehsan Jaffri before he was put to death, and gave a detailed account to the Concerned Citizen's Tribunal.

The survivor reports that Jaffri, speaking in Gujarati, first pleaded with the mob for forgiveness: “He said that all the residents of Gulbarg would leave without any belongings, only their lives.” Members of the crowd responded, ““You burn our parents, our sisters, so we will not spare you.”” Then the Parsi lady herself shouted,

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<sup>32</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 32.

“‘I am a Parsi –we are neither Hindus nor Muslims,’ to which they replied, ‘We know no Parsis or anything else.’ They were in such a murderous mood at the time.”<sup>33</sup> Jaffri allowed himself to be drug out of his apartment with piously folded hands and beaten. “He was stripped, paraded naked, and asked to say, ‘*Vande Mataram!*’ [Hail the Mother(land)] and ‘*Jai Shri Ram!*’ [Hail to Ram]. He refused. His fingers were chopped off and he was paraded around in the locality, badly injured. Next his hands and feet were chopped off. He was then dragged, a fork-like instrument clutching his neck, down the road, before being thrown into the fire.”<sup>34</sup> The triumphant crowd took their time, drawing out the execution for 45 minutes. Many others were caught and killed, including Anwar, who was cut into pieces and burnt in one of the four bizarrely prepared funeral pyres with wooden logs brought from the nearby Sansar Bakery, and Hafi Mohammed Munawar Sheikh, who was “cut into three pieces” and burnt still alive.<sup>35</sup> Many others now missing, were undoubtedly killed, but no one witnessed their deaths.

After Jaffri’s body was brutally tortured and burned in front of his home, the crowd broke all of its doors and windows before torching it. The Parsi witness remembers, “‘The mobs were shouting ‘*Jai Sri Ram!*’ and ‘Kill! Slaughter! This is what they did to us in Godhra. We will do the same to them here!’”<sup>36</sup> Other witnesses stated that the gas cylinders for heating and cooking in all the abandoned homes were brought together as ammunition for the attacks. Chemicals were thrown on the floor. The people trapped inside begged, with folded hands, to be let out but the crowd showed no mercy.<sup>37</sup> Several women were in fact allowed to leave or pulled out under

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<sup>33</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup>GG, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 30.

the pretext that they would be saved, but an eyewitness who testified before the Concerned Citizen's Tribunal saw the women being raped and killed.<sup>38</sup>

A twenty-three old eyewitness and survivor who suffered a serious head injury told Human Rights Watch, "First they took everyone's jewelry. Then they raped the women, then they cut them up and then they burnt them. They should get as strict a punishment as possible (...). I was hit with a pipe. We ran outside when the gas cylinder exploded and then later the police came and we left."<sup>39</sup> This woman also witnessed the murder of her husband's brother and wife, "They pulled them out and cut them up. When we came out then we saw that he was cut in the stomach, the chest and the head. They came with *trishuls* [the three-pronged trident of the God Shiva]. My sister-in-law was burnt. First they took her jewelry. Then took her into the kitchen and exploded the gas cylinder. They wanted to get rid of all the evidence. They had been married for fifteen months and she was five months pregnant."<sup>40</sup> Another witness, incidentally a Hindu neighbor, reported, "They pulled the babies out with the men, then poured petrol over them, and burnt them. Police stood back."<sup>41</sup>

Between 3:30 and 4:30 pm, between ten and twelve women were gang raped, cut into pieces with *guptis* and then thrown into the fire.<sup>42</sup> Petrol in plastic bags had been thrown on the surviving victims, so they would eventually catch fire more easily. By this time only one room of Jaffri's home was not on fire, and that was where the rioters now directed the attack. Anyone who came out of Jaffri's home was killed, either with swords or by pouring kerosene over them and torching them.<sup>43</sup> In any case, most of the trapped victims had already lost consciousness and collapsed from asphyxiation. Chemicals had been spread into the only remaining room that was not

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<sup>38</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup>HRW, p. 19-20.

<sup>40</sup>HRW, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup>GG, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup>GG, p. 27. A *gupti* is a pointed weapon concealed in a stick, or the concealed blade of a sword.

<sup>43</sup>CCT, Vol.1, p. 28.

on fire, and then, after the seals had been removed, gas cylinders were thrown in. With fireballs providing the spark, the cylinders exploded like bombs. The blast was so powerful that it exposed the structural steel rods of the structure behind the peeling plaster.

At around 4:45 pm the police finally arrived and most of the attackers fled. When the police began to rescue survivors, however, the remaining members of the crowd stoned them again. A survivor who had not been in Jaffri's house urged police official named ACP Tandon to help the people trapped inside, but the ACP hesitated to act promptly.

Yet there were survivors of the massacre at Gulbarg colony, twenty-one who have subsequently given depositions. When the police escorted them out of the compound, they, also, were stoned as they left for the relief camps. According to the Concerned Citizens Tribunal and Communalism Combat, seventy people were killed in a six-hour-long mayhem. According to Human Rights Watch sixty-five were killed. The Gujarat government first published the number 59, an exact equivalent to the number of Godhra victims. Of the dead, forty-nine were residents of the compound, ten to twelve came from adjacent neighborhoods as they had sought refuge in Jaffri's home during previous bouts of violence.

In many reports and affidavits, disturbing references are made to the way in which the bodies of the victims were treated during and after the act of raping and killing. We have already seen how men are not simply killed, but rather, killed by chopping them to pieces while they are still alive. The tortured bodies are then thrown into the fire. The references to the treatment of women even surpasses this perversity. Women's bodies were not only tortured through beating, rape, and burning, but their body openings were penetrated with sharp weapons and their genitals were mutilated.

There seems to be a perverse logic at work here obsessing about female body openings, and in those cases of pregnant women, to destroy the fetus in the womb:

“I state that finally at around 6:30 (sic!) in the evening, I went out of the hiding place. I saw dead bodies of women lying on the road. None of the bodies were covered. They were all burnt and shrunken. There were a few bodies of women, where ‘loha dandas’ [iron rods] were shoved up their vagina. Looking at the sight I fell dizzy. In spite of that I could see a few Hindus standing aside and laughing at us. They were saying ‘aare yeh miya kaha se bachke nikal gaye?’ (...)” [oh my, how did these Muslims get saved, from where did they come out?].<sup>44</sup>

Or, “(...) I found the body saw the torn clothes of my sister-in-law and traced her dead wounded body near my house in the garden. Her throat was cut open with a sword. I state that she was also raped because I found her private parts severely injured and mutilated.”<sup>45</sup>

Or, “I state that I witnessed Kharum Bano, (...), being gang raped by around 15-20 unidentified men who were part of the mob. First her clothes were stripped using swords and she was completely rendered naked. Even as she pleaded for mercy, she was raped, after which swords were thrust into her stomach and she was thrown into the fire which was set ablaze close by, to die.”<sup>46</sup>

The Concerned Citizen’s Tribunal reports, “The extent of the macabre delight that perpetrators took in the crimes committed was evident in what some residents saw on the evening of February 28. When some witnesses returned to the area later that evening, they saw neighborhood goons ‘playing cricket’ with the skulls of the dead.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Affidavit of twenty-year old Rehana Hafiz Khan.

<sup>45</sup> Affidavit of twenty-six year old Suraiya Bano Khan.

<sup>46</sup> Affidavit of thirty-year old Ruksana Bano Khan.

<sup>47</sup> CCT, Vol.1, p. 31.

### 2.3.3 From detail to denial: an afterthought

I tried to talk to Ahmedabadis about Gulbarg Society, Naroda Patia, and Naroda Gaon. Unlike middle class Ahmedabadis, who often simply denied massacres and explicated everything by reciprocal logic of “anger” (*krodh*), “riot” (*tofaan*), and “reaction” (*pratikriya*), several members of lower strata admitted to me having “seen” (*joyu*) things connected to the massacres in and around the city, or simply claimed to “know” (*mane samje chhe, khabar chhe*) something about them. They claim to have been spectators. This openness lasts for roughly three weeks after the beginning of the violence. Later it becomes increasingly difficult to talk with anyone about the massacres.

These initial accounts are mostly descriptions of what was seen, what was done, and what has happened. They were spoken in spontaneous moments without recording device or taking notes. Curiously, my attempts to specify statements and observations, sometimes even only to contextualize them in space and time, failed. It never became quite clear to me if the “knowing” (*mane khabar chhe*) and the “seeing” (*me joyu*) of my interlocutors actually implied their having been present and seeing with their own eyes. The relation and role of the interlocutor to the spoken, to what has happened and what was seen, was never exactly evident to me (“*je thayu te joyu*”). Has the interlocutor actually “witnessed” in person with his own two eyes, the things he described with so much hubris, the cutting, the thrashing, the burning?

Simultaneous and contrary to this tendency there is an insistence on details, which I had never asked for. The odd penchant for detail narrated in an air of unselfconscious fascination relates significantly to my general impression, that many of my interlocutors’ accounts were not necessarily personally witnessed. One might argue that this is only natural because there is an understandable fear of serious consequences if one were to reveal to have been present at major massacres. But this

reason alone does not convince me. Fear of prosecution was largely absent in the initial days of violence. According to my observations, there was shockingly little concern for prosecution at all, and if there was, interlocutors simply did not engage in conversation.

Within this confusion about, whose witnessing is it (who precisely is the origin of experience?) there are the constant references to the body pieces of the victims. The number of pieces into which a specific victim is cut is often added, when giving information of his or her death; or whether a sword stuck into a woman entered frontally or in the side; if it actually exited on the other side or if it did not; if the head was severed before burning the torso or not; whether some limb was severed and if which limb etc. The incredible acts of violence were not only narrated by referring to cutting (*kat karvu*), burning (*salgavavu, balvu*), and stabbing (*ghayl karvu, cheri maarvi*), but by stressing that victims were cut into several pieces (*tukdo*), pierced (*bhokvu*, to penetrate) and severed (*kaapvu*, to disjoin). Almost all of my interlocutors found this fact again and again important to mention.

Somehow my interlocutors were in the events in a very different way than we usually understand a term like “agency” and “participation.” Similarly to the Sandesh reportage described above, what was actually “seen,” what is “known,” and what is reported in papers or at tea stalls, becomes almost indistinguishable. The rather odd penchant for detail in the face of ambiguity concerning participation in the events is revelatory of the fact that what was seen or imagined, or precisely both together, still has power over the speaker. The spoken words do not yet seem to create a distance between act and word. The words make the act reappear (instead of disappear) and the speaker re-experiences what the word describes. Language repeats and does not create discourse (memory). It is not clear to me where the origin of this experience lies which calls for expression in this way.

Additionally, at the very same moment where assuming “Hindu” or “Muslim” identity becomes a matter of life and death in the city, these categories lose all meaning in relation to the act of describing the violence. As if “Hindu” and “Muslim” were in a relation of complete substitutability vis-a-vis the violent acts committed (burning, cutting, killing etc.), interlocutors often switched from describing the burning and raping of Muslim women to the cutting of Hindu women’s breasts, to the penetration of Muslim women’s vaginas with sharp objects and vice versa. Only when I intervened and specifically asked, as if by secondary rationalization, was a need felt to clarify. I do not think that it was important to make clear who killed whom exactly, although my interlocutors quite certainly would deny that. Rather, stress and emphasis was laid on *how* people were killed. However, if the religious identity of the victims was secondary, the gender of the victim was usually not omitted or neglected.

It seems ironical that in the very moment of communal frenzy, which brings into play the asymmetric binary categories that legitimizes the violence in the first place (Hindu versus Muslim) the religious binary collapses and is of secondary importance when people narrate the violence. In this way, the speech acts were completely indebted to the possibilities expressed in violence, especially the intimate access to someone else’s body, preferably a female body, its penetration and annihilation. In many people’s excited accounts, Godhra and the post-Godhra violence become simply exchangeable spectacles, which needed to be described not in the register of a rapport, but “experienced” in the telling, as if my interlocutor was the original witness himself. This is why the gender of the victim comes to assume such significance, because bodies are spent and ruled over freely by others.

People who possibly might have not been spectators inhabited the acts of others in a strange way, confusing me because the “imagined” acts are not at all false,



as we have seen in the above. The incredible massacres did indeed happen. It is strange because the participation in the reenactment is so strong. The acts of murder actually happened. Someone committed them in real time. Inversely, even in those cases where a person explicitly claims not to have been present, he nonetheless describes what happened in such detail, that he gives the impression he saw everything himself. It is as if he saw it all happen right in front of him.

Contrary to common sense there was no “invention” in these imaginings, which placed the subject in a context where he physically was not necessarily present at the time. The detailed-ness expresses an overstatement, but of a kind, which does not distort the truth but, uncannily, rather reveals it. There is no “falseness” in the claims. Official affidavits and analytic reports about the massacres (in English), like the one’s used above, are pregnant with similar references from perpetrators, victims, as well as eye witnesses.

After approximately three weeks, some of the same people will deny ever having been involved in any way whatsoever, as if consciousness has finally registered the possible consequences of such authoritative speech. Therefore, it now became impossible to address certain questions, like the exact behavior of the police, the manner of killing, cases of rape and burning. The shift from detail to denial takes the form of silence, perhaps indicating fear of prosecution at last, or finally, shame. Becoming what I thought they had been all along, all carefree participation in the acts was now being subtracted from the telling, which had caused them to give me such a detailed account some weeks earlier.

I believe, what the above shows is a collective fascination for these acts of violence. Not everyone is guilty of having committed atrocities, but even individuals who were mere “spectators”--as were large parts of residents in neighborhoods where

massacres were committed--participated in murder, arson, looting, and mutilation through this strange form of enthusiastic participation.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The events described in this chapter appear to be the result of a well-planned campaign of extermination, humiliation, and intimidation sanctioned by the Gujarat government against Muslim communities, the goal of which is ostensibly to allow organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and Bajrang Dal (BD) to make their sinister point. The collective effervescence allowed for an act of punishment meted out by a “Hindu community” to a “Muslim community.”

The events are consistent with the classic definition of a pogrom, as coined in Russia to refer to government-sanctioned attacks on Jews, a cultural-ethnic minority, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which then became more extreme and virulent—genocidal-- in Poland and Germany.<sup>48</sup> Although it is difficult to conclusively prove that the Modi government directly partook in organizing the events of February 28, its rhetoric following the Godhra incident certainly encouraged the massacre that transpired.<sup>49</sup> My goals here have been more modest, simply to document the sequence of events on the day before and the day of the most extensive organized violence in Ahmedabad. In any case, a pogrom is never successful without widespread complicity on the part of non-participants in the actual violence. The next chapter follows such reactions to these events.

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<sup>48</sup>Usually translated as devastation, destruction, the word “pogrom” derives etymologically from the Russian *grom* means “thunder,” *gromit* “to thunder, to destroy without pity.” The OED defines pogrom as “an organized massacre for the destruction or annihilation of any body or class.” Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, 1987. I use pogrom instead of massacre or riot to emphasize its planned, repetitive, cyclical, and communal nature.

<sup>49</sup>The reports of HRW, CCT, and GG strongly suggest the planned participation of the Gujarat government.

In the chapter above (two), I found it particularly important to describe the violence in detail in order not only to point to the inconsistencies between the claim to “anger” and the carnevalesque enactment of fun, but also to show the circuitry between media representation (in chapter three), the enactment of violent acts on the street, and collective participation of “spectators,” neighbors, and “witnesses.” I chose just two sites –Shahpur and Gulbarg-- to offer an impression of the myriad events that unfolded in the city as well as in central Gujarat on the first day. It should be clear to the reader that Ahmedabad witnessed many more weeks of pogrom violence, an appalling tenseness for many months, and communal clashes for a very long time. In fact, the violence never really stopped until by the time I left the city in 2003. It just became displaced into specific neighborhoods, was ignored by the media, or assumed petrified forms in neighborhood fortifications and the erection of inner city boundaries, mental as well as physical. The city remains more scarred than ever today (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Ahmedabad Tran Darwaja during curfew in March 2002, in the usually crowded old city center.

## Chapter 3.0 Word and Image in the Mimesis of Violence

### 3.1 Sacrificial script

This chapter explicates the imaginary grid that motivated, justified, and made sense of the violence of the 2002 Gujarati pogrom to its participants, Hindu and Muslim alike. Of particular importance is the linguistic deployment of an unusually evocative terminology, the circulation of rumors as news, the circulation of images of corpses, and visual imagery drawn directly from the feature film *Gadar*. Media representations of the violence and their reception by an all-too-willing-to-believe audience suggest the enactment of a script that precedes the events and changes its substance only in detail. I argue here that the pogrom is an acting-out of a sacrificial logic that has special salience in the Indian context. As a manifestation of a sacrificial complex, this violence was motivated not only by an “initial” violent attack--the burning of Hindu pilgrims in Godhra--but by a mimetic desire that preceded the Godhra incident and provided a rationale for enactment of violence in the Gujarati pogrom of 2002.

On June 15, 2001, the film *Gadar, ek prem katha*, directed by Anil Sharma (2001), was released and had a long and popular run in Gujarati theaters. Due to the excitement in the audiences with whom I had seen the film several times in the city of Baroda that year, I had already taken cognizance of the movie six months before the pogrom began. I thought it rather curious that a movie about a romance across religious boundaries would nonetheless lead to so much communal effervescence in Gujarat especially when its protagonist was not a representative Hindu but a Panjabi actor playing a Sikh. Yet, as I will demonstrate below, the imagery from this movie formed a central referent in print media accounts, serving not merely to obfuscate what happened in the Godhra incident, but also to summon the specter of Partition, the more ghostlike since central Gujarat had no direct experience of Partition violence. In

the use of words, in the deployment of a discourse on sacrifice, and in rumors of abducted women, a mimetic logic becomes apparent: what one imagines has been done is scripted in detail in order to later act it out.

The newspaper articles the day after the Godhra incident and the day the Gujarat pogrom began on February 28, 2002, deserve our close attention as they bring into play a language and an imaginary grid that becomes important in the following days and weeks. I focus my analysis mainly on the reports of this day, with some reference to individual articles and images in the following days. The method of analysis I pursue here is paradigmatic. I concentrate on the Times of India, a national English-language newspaper, and Sandesh, a Gujarati-language newspaper, both in their respective Ahmedabad editions, largely because the people I became most intimate with, and who inform much of this ethnography, were most informed by these two papers. Neither newspaper is a paper of record and there are many superior papers--more accurate, analytical, detailed--of local Gujarati or national repute.<sup>50</sup> Along with Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh is one of the two largest vernacular papers in Gujarat and known to be close to the BJP.<sup>51</sup> In 2002, the Times of India, one of the largest English newspapers in South Asia, had a combined circulation of 61 lakhs (1 lakh = 100,000). As a national newspaper, it produces many local versions that reflect the tremendous variations in considerations of newsworthiness in India. Sandesh, with a combined circulation (five editions) of 7.05 lakhs,<sup>52</sup> produces several versions in

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<sup>50</sup>The newspapers used for this study include Sandesh, Gujarat Samachar, Western Times, Times of India, The Indian Express, The Hindu, Asian Age; the magazines include Outlook, Frontline, and India Today.

<sup>51</sup>In fact the newspaper received a letter written from the Chief Minister in which he thanks the editor personally for the paper's "decisive role as link between the people and the government." The letter claims Sandesh "served humanity in a big way" by "exercising restraint during the communal disturbances" after the Godhra incident. It ends with "I am grateful to you." The full letter is published in Siddharth Varadarajan (2002), p. 286. The original source is RW, Annexure 4.

<sup>52</sup>For comparison, the main competitor Gujarat Samachar had a circulation of 8.10 lakhs in 2002. A note of caution here: In India newspaper circulation numbers are known to be manipulated and hardly ever reliable. According to editor-in-chief Falgun Patel, however, Sandesh's circulation increased by 150,000 copies during the "riots," because of its "pro-Hindu stand." cf. RW, p. 7-8.

Gujarat, and its circulation extends to Bombay due to that city's large Gujarati population.

Newspapers accounts became important for me only *after* I had encounters with residents on the streets of Ahmedabad during the pogrom. I heard rumors and stories in which people repeatedly referred to the movie *Gadar*, to abducted and mutilated women, to Muslim terrorism—and in these stories I noticed a sheer explosion in the use of sacrificial terms. Only several months after the pogroms did I systematically read and translate Sandesh. In the first weeks of violence, I was preoccupied with many other more important activities, mainly simply to document what exactly happened in public. Initially I thought the references to sacrifice that I heard on the streets were merely variants of expressions for killing. But after I read the first published reports of the killings, the employed terminologies that I had heard seemed more significant than I had initially assumed. There was a recurrence of terms. In order to understand how the Gujarati reader is called upon to participate in the news accounts, it is important to reconstruct how the news of this important day after Godhra predisposes one to a particular reading. Especially in Sandesh, and to a lesser extent in the Times of India, news takes on the structure of rumors. Rumor (people's talk) tends to supplement these news accounts and these papers, in turn, supplement people's rumors (their talk). Language and images are used as templates for the imagination, for the basis for a script that functions as do myths in Malinowski's Trobriand account.<sup>53</sup>

The paradigmatic quality of the text, and its reliance on and circulation of rumor, emerges clearly only if one bothers to read most, or all, of the articles in the paper in question and not only a selected few articles. Each printed version is read, or

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<sup>53</sup>For different media analyses during the Gujarat pogroms see RW, CCT, GG, HRW, *The Survivor's Speak*, and Siddharth Varadarajan (2002). None concerned themselves significantly with language use. RW and CCT mentioned the excessive screening of "patriotic" movies such as *Gadar* but do not attempt to interpret its use.

the images viewed, not only by a single purchaser but passed around to, in my estimate, many other readers. To explicate this quality, I have chosen articles of Sandesh from February 28, 2002, from page 1 (front page), 2, 7, 14, and 16; from March 2, 2002, from page 1 and 5; from Times of India from February 28, 2002 from page 1 (front page) and 3; from March 1, 2002, from page 4 and 5; and from March 3, 2002 page 3. I have translated most articles from Gujarati, and shortened them. This selection should give a representative overview of what was reported and especially how it was reported. I supplemented my own everyday linguistic competency with eight different Gujarati-English and Gujarati-Gujarati dictionaries. I include the article titles in the text or in the footnotes in both Gujarati and English, respectively.

### 3.2 Print media reportage of the Godhra incident in Sandesh February 28, 2002

The front page of Sandesh depicts the burning coach S6 with touching pictures of women victims and their bloodied bandages. They gaze into the camera, clearly traumatized and holding on to each other. The heading reads, “60 Hindus burnt alive”<sup>54</sup>; the sub headline, “Today Gujarat is *bandh*.” The first article is titled, “The cowardly Godhra incident echoes nationally: many states on high alert.” The text reports how the ‘*Godhrakand*’ (the Godhra incident) is spilling into other states and cities.<sup>55</sup> The Inspector general of police says that the police force has been put on “red alert” especially in all “border areas” (*taman sarhadi jillaalomaa*) and in “sensitive areas” (*savedanshil vistaaromaa*). The states named include Rajasthan, Maharashtra and the city of Mumbai, Bengal and the city of Calcutta. There is talk of the police being alert everywhere to arrest “anti-social elements” (*asamaajik tatvo*).

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<sup>54</sup>Sandesh February 28, 2002, p. 1. In the following, Sandesh will be through PTI (Press Trust India) or a representative. Times of India will be through an actual author or TNN (Times News Network).

<sup>55</sup>The term “*Godhrakand*” will often be replaced in the following days by “*Godhra hatyakand*” (the Godhra massacre, the Godhra slaughter).



Within the magical space of a single sentence spoken by a police officer trying to identify the possible sites of danger, a homology is established here between “border areas” and “sensitive areas”. Reference to a “border” signifies the external threat, while the word “sensitive” signifies an internal one. Internal and external threats are equated and supplement each other. “Sensitive areas” in a city like Ahmedabad, where Sandesh is published, are in the inner city where the many so-called “mini-Pakistans” border on “Hindustan.” And, in fact, all “sensitive areas” of the inner city do function like “border areas.”<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2.1 From incident to event

In another front page article from Sandesh under the headline “Godhra was a one sided violent act of criminals of one community: Modi,”<sup>57</sup> the sub heading reads: “Chief Minister Narendra Modi admits that the intrigue was formerly planned.”<sup>58</sup> Modi’s speech is paraphrased: such a cowardly act was not committed by any cultured *samaaj* (group). The act is “not a communal incident” (*komi ghatnaa nathi*) but the “one sided collective violent act of terrorism from one community” (*ek komnu ek tarafi saamuhik hinsaanu trasvaadi krutya*). “Those who committed violence will pay a high price for this act,” Modi says, (*hinsaakhoro aa krutya ni aakari kimat chukavavi padshe*). The article twice repeats this expression and the preceding statement. In an adjacent small box, the VHP is quoted as saying that the Godhra incident was the work of a religiously zealous terrorism (*dharma jhanuni aatankvaad*), due to the sins (*paape*) of *binsampradaik netao* (secular political leaders).

Modi’s insistence that the Godhra incident was not “communal” (*komi*) and was not committed by any ordinary group (*samaaj*) is a paradoxical formulation. At

<sup>56</sup>Sandesh headquarters itself is situated opposite the BJP office in Khanpur adjacent to a Muslim area, close to a “border area.”

<sup>57</sup>Sandesh February 28, 2002, p. 1. The title reads in Gujarati: “Godhrano banav ekaj komni ek tarafi hinsanu trasvaadi krutya: Modi.”

<sup>58</sup>“*purva yojit kaavtaru hovaanu svikaarataa mukhyamantri*”

first one might expect that the initial disclaimer serves the purpose to unite all communities around the incident: Muslims, Hindus, Christian, Sikhs, and others. One might expect that the Chief Minister would try to thwart the attempt to divide communities along religious and ethnic lines on the basis of a general condemnation of a criminal act by some “terrorists.” In this way the horror of the incident in Godhra could be used to undo what the attackers seem to have attempted: to ignite communal fires. By treating the incident as a criminal act, the contagion of violence would be contained. But, quite ingeniously, the Chief Minister does the very opposite of what one might expect and what he claims to do.

Modi further communalizes the moment by the very act of saying that the Godhra incident is *not* a communal incident--*komi ghatnaa nathi*. The assertion that the Godhra incident is not communal is followed by *ek komnu ek tarafi saamuhik hinsaanu traasvaadi krutya*. Instead of being “communal,” it is the “one sided collective violent act of terrorism from one community” against the other. It was not communal (*komi*), but nonetheless from one community (*ek komnu tarafi*). Here we see in pure form Modi’s equating of the threat of “communalism” with “terrorism.” When he references “terrorism,” he means “collective terrorism” of one community against the other. By this shift the usual equation of “criminality” and “communalism” is replaced by the equation of “communalism” and “terrorism.”

The Chief Minister’s public claim has peculiar resonance in a state where communal violence is part of everyday life and experience. The petty criminal who uses the cover of communalism to pay off scores ceases to exist as a separate, bounded, and distinct category. The “criminal” merges with the “terrorist.” Both morph into an entire community, now criminal and terrorist. The Muslim law-breaker becomes a Muslim terrorist working in tandem with an entire community.

The usual emotional and intellectual strategies of moderate middle-class Gujaratis to attribute recurring incidences of communal violence to specific “*goondas*” (criminals) and “anti-social elements,” preferably from the minority community, are no longer effective. The narrative of underworld dons engaged in the business of contraband liquor who are connected to corrupt local politicians and the police is implicitly dismissed. The “criminal” and “anti-social” is transformed with one authoritative sentence into the “terrorist” and the “anti-national.”

This transformation, long in the making, becomes now more salient and effective. This process does not originate for the first time with the Narendra Modi government, but is part and parcel of the strategy to nationalize all local conflict. The *Sangh Parivar* continually produces a discourse of division amalgamating Partition, the Kashmir conflict, and local communalist politics. In voicing what many believe, their propaganda pamphlets, and public utterances, insinuate in diverse forms the closeness of Muslims to terrorism, blending the “anti-social” with the “anti-national,” always implicating local Muslim communities.<sup>59</sup>

Residents of Ahmedabad in favor of the Modi government echo this switch from *komvaad* to *traasvaad* in the streets, telling me, for example, “This is not a communal issue, this is about terrorism” (“*komvaad ni savaal nathi, e to aatankvaad*”

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<sup>59</sup>The ground for the equation of Muslims with “criminality” had already been prepared in Ahmedabad in the 1980s where local dons (Hindu and Muslim alike), connected to underworld activities of contraband liquor, aided and abetted repeatedly “riots,” that were backed by local politicians. In the 1990s after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Bombay serial blasts of 1993 a series of events can be identified, which radicalized this already divisive discourse. During the Kargil riots in Ahmedabad in 1999, I personally witnessed for the first time the emergence of an exuberant terminology. The symbolic labor to produce this discourse entailed a tripartite blending of Muslims as “Invader,” “Inner enemy,” and “Intruder” or “Infiltrator.” “Invader” referred to the historical advent of Islam in the Northwest of the subcontinent between the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively (Arabs, Afghans, and Mongols). The “Muslim invasion” inaugurated what British colonial historiography referred to as “Medieval India” and the downfall of “ancient Hindu glory.” The “inner enemy” referred to those Muslims who identify with the enemy country Pakistan. “Intruder” and “infiltrators” militant outfits or Fedayeen commandos in Kashmir referred to those who had crossed the border onto Indian territory in the wake of the Kargil war in 1999. The term was also used generally to invoke India’s vulnerability given the unfeasibility of surveillance along the border. Finally, the terrorist attack on Parliament in 2001, on an American center in Kolkata shortly after in 2002, and not the least the reverberation of 9/11 with the new war on terror played an important role here.

*ni savaal chhe...*").<sup>60</sup> A genuinely "communal" matter would require that the municipal authorities, especially the police, respond quickly, that they appeal to the moderate citizens to remain calm, that they blame criminal elements for the eruption of violence. A terrorist matter elevates the incident to a national, or international concern. It now concerns everyone and offers endless possibilities for patriotic mobilization, interpellating all residents into a relationship to the incident.

By deploying the formal term *krutya* the ground is also laid linguistically for the later *pratikrati* and *pratikriya* to emerge. The terms *krutya* (act, deed, behavior) and *kriya* (action, rite, execution of a sacrifice) demands a *pratikrati* (retaliation, revenge, counteracting, remedying) or *pratikriya* (cure, remedy, reaction, retaliation). Only three days into the Gujarat pogroms, after the worst massacres on Muslims have been made public, Modi proclaims, "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction." People refer to his statement as Modi's invocation of "Newton's third law," suggesting sarcastically some sort of scientific necessity.<sup>61</sup> A logic of legitimate reaction emerges to give meaning to and justify the event, and in the streets a festival of violence follows. Simultaneously, Home Minister L.K. Advani and the Union Defense Minister George Fernandez in the BJP-led coalition government, authoritatively underscore that Godhra was a planned attack. All subsequent violence appears as nothing other than the usual "communal violence." In pamphlets, statements, and on the street, this "reaction" is expressed through terms like *pratikriya* (reaction, counter-action), *pratyaghaat* (reaction, re-act), or *pratikruti* (return, reflection, copy, replace).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>The terms *traasvaad* and *aatankvaad* are used synonymously for 'terrorism' in Gujarat.

<sup>61</sup>*Times of India* March 3 2002, p. 1. Also cited in GG, p. 37.

<sup>62</sup>The slight switch from *ghatna* (incident) to *krutya* (deed) and *kriya* (action) happens less directly than the switch from *komvaad* (communalism) to *traasvaad* (terrorism), but it is not less important for what it implicitly allows. Only *after* the organized violence is in full swing does labeling it a legitimate *pratikriya* (reaction, remedy) present a Pritialistic logic of action and reaction, derived from Vedic Pritialism itself, with which the *Sangh Parivar* is so obsessed. *Pratikriya* always follows logically out of *kriya* as *kriya* means an act that allows for an automatic remedy, a *pratikriya*. *Kriya* and *pratikriya*

In the middle of page 7, inside a box with the title, “The attacks on the Sabarmati Express were a systematic evil plot,”<sup>63</sup> an article claims that it was being revealed that the incident in Godhra was a “well-planned systematic evil plot” (*svyasthit purvayojit kaavtaru*). The article describes the secretly (*guptchar*) planned attack on the train with the aid of bombs and bottles, stones and petrol. It elaborates on the fact that the Sabarmati express was several hours late (suggesting the attackers had somehow acquired prior information of this), that the travelers sitting in the train were killed by being “roasted” (*ander bethela musaafaro tya bhujaai marya hata*), and that through the communal clashes in 1942, 1969, 1985, and 1992 the town had already become sensitive (*samvedan*). The VHP together with the government will not retreat, the author says (*pichhehath karvaana maagti nathi*), and continues that the name of the train is derived from the “priest” (*pujaari*) of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, in order to memorialize his Ashram with the same name. The “design” (English, *dijhaain*) of the attack is thus clearly visible in the choice of a sensitive town and the specific train (in other words, its name). The goal, therefore, was presumably to provoke (*chhachhedvaa maa*) and cowardly instigate violence that, the author goes on to say, must then erupt naturally as a reaction in a sensitive city (*tena pratyaghaato ...pade e svaabhaavik chhe*).

This formulation also brings into play the important dynamic of the external and internal. Godhra is a communally sensitive town, it is argued. It has been sensitive for a long time. But the assumption of “pre-meditating” and “pre-planning” leads one to understand this fact not as an explanation for how and why provocation was successful in the first place. Rather it gives evidence that outside forces

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are understood to be outside of theoretical knowledge (that is, meaning) and belong to the domain of Prithal practice itself (sense). The term *kriya* connotes Prithal acts of all kinds such as religious ceremonies, funeral rites, and any method of doing a thing (rather than a theory about doing a thing).

<sup>63</sup>Sandesh February 28, 2002. p. 7. “*Sabarmati express tren parnaa humlaani ghatna ek vyavasthit kaavtaru*.” *kaavtaru* means evil and secret plot, intrigue.

ingeniously chose the very town that was sensitive. Similarly, the fact that the Sabarmati Express was several hours late does not cast doubt on the claim of pre-meditation, but on the contrary gives evidence that the attackers had access to information even the local police did not. Paranoia structures the facts. The design was to provoke “reactions” (*pratyaghaato*), which then must follow “naturally” (*svaabhaavik*).

On the same page as the above argument, the author picks up these insinuations and draws together the ISI (Pakistani Inter-Intelligence Services), terrorism, and communalism.<sup>64</sup> The residents of Godhra, he claims, have been saying for years that *sarhaad ni ander* (inside the border) there are many *atankvaadio* (terrorists). Godhra has been the center of many “communal sacrificial fires.” Why the rather odd expression *komi hutaashanionu kendra* (sic!), *hutaashan* meaning sacrificial fire?<sup>65</sup> Speaking in the name of the Hindu residents of Godhra, the author asks: “Who will save us? Who is our saviour?”<sup>66</sup> It then “summarizes” the history of victimization of Hindus in Godhra since Independence, when demonic activities (*pishaachi pravratiti*) were committed openly.<sup>67</sup> In communal incidences in 1948, 1980, 1990, and 1992, Hindus have always been the major victims numerically, the author falsely claims. “The Hindus in Godhra have collectively been slaughtered (*saamuhik rite rahesi naakhvaanaa*), burnt (*salgaavi devaani*), or killed one-by-one (*ek-ek karine mari naakhvaanaa*).”

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<sup>64</sup>Sandesh, February 28, 2002. p. 7. “*Godhraavaasio kahe chhe aa to varshthi chalto sarhad ni anderno antakvaad chhe*” (“Godhra residents claim that terrorists have been inside the border for years”).

<sup>65</sup>There are two spelling mistakes in *hutaashni* in Sandesh. The term is rarely used for sacrifice. Usually *bali*, *qurbani*, or *yajna* are used; *hutaashani* is the pile arranged and kindled at the festival of Holi; *hutaashani* literally is the *holi*. Cf. TMGED.

<sup>66</sup>*Aa prajaa puchhe chhe: amne jivte jiv nark jovaani aa sajaamaathi kon chhodaavshe? Kon amne bachaavshe? Kon amari beli che?*

<sup>67</sup>This sentence has an important onomatopoeic ‘ring’ to it in Gujarati: *Pishaachi pravratitino khullo khel khelay che*. (“The she-ghosts were playing the game openly” or “Devilish games are played openly”). *Pishaachi* literally means she-ghost.

The equation of terrorism with communalism becomes even more emphatic the following day when in the Times of India Modi is quoted as saying that the “black deed” of Godhra shows “how collective terrorism could take an organized form”<sup>68</sup>; the whole world, he continues, had condemned the “organized terrorist act.” He suggests a belated parity with the event of 9/11 in the United States, defining Godhra, as Bush did 9/11, as an attack not on one group but on the whole world. Unlike Bush, however, Modi unambiguously implicates all minority Muslim communities having easy symbolic recourse to long established patterns of stigmatization and prejudice.

By “collective terrorism,” Modi in fact means “communalism,” what Gujaratis usually refer to as *komvaad* (communalism). There are many words that the Chief Minister could have chosen, but he insists on using those that most closely approximate the English word “terrorism.” The threat is, in other words, not old but something emergent and new.<sup>69</sup> Communal clashes, whether religious or caste motivated, are usually referred to as *tofan*, *dhamaal*, *ramkan*, *ladaai*, or *hullad*.<sup>70</sup> Sandesh most frequently uses the term *tofan* (mischief, tumult, battle) to refer to communal violence, but for the Godhra incident it curiously disappears, while immediately reappearing to refer to the post-Godhra pogroms.<sup>71</sup>

To be sure, local communal history has in no way been harmless or benign. Reports of communal violence and eyewitness accounts of riots in Gujarat from

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<sup>68</sup>Times of India, March 1, 2002, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup>Modi is of course taking advantage of the “global war on terror,” begun by the Bush administration after 9/11, and combines it with a local discourses on communalism and anti-Muslim sentiments.

<sup>70</sup>Throughout Ahmedabad *tofan*, the English “riots,” and the simple “*himsa*” (violence) are the most common expressions for communal violence. All three also seem to be used preferably for Hindu-Muslim violence. Additional terms for any urban violence inclusive of the above are *ramkan* (riots, trouble, destruction), *dhamaal* (disorder, commotion), *ladaai* (battle, war, quarrel), and *hullad* (disturbance, tumult, mischief, riot, brawl, rebellious). The term *humlo* (attack and assault) is also used frequently. The term *hullad* appears in 2002 time and again in “*hulladia Hanuman*,” a specific form of makeshift temple, for the deity Hanuman, erected directly on destroyed or desecrated Muslim shrines, and thus symbolically incorporating the sacred Muslim space into the Hindu fold.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Sandesh March 2, 2002, p. 5. In Gujarati, the term *tofan* is also used tenderly for children who do not behave, who are then called *tofani*.

previous years and decades are terrifying.<sup>72</sup> In the violence of 2002, however, the charge of terrorism adds something new that radicalizes the nature of collective violence in the context of Indian politics. It elevates the Godhra incident to a higher plane, becoming a continuation of Partition, and therefore a national tragedy instead of a local event.

The equation of communal violence with terrorism, moreover, allows for the pogrom to emerge laden with sacrificial terminology that unifies Hindus in new ways. A pogrom is, in some sense, a violent social technology, a cleansing device that makes into sacrificial victim a portion of one's own society. In order to be successful, the Gujarati pogrom required the complicity of large parts of mainstream society, of people who are normally not unwary or naïve of the political usages of religion, however communal they might be in their own sentiments. This complicity was obtained, I am arguing, by first disallowing any distancing from the Godhra incident, and second by creating unity by mandating identification with the Hindu as victim, and third by legitimating violent "reaction" as an extra-legal necessity to fight terrorism.

The Gujarat pogroms required an incident like Godhra. To create complicity, the incident was in need of transformation. Instead of remaining a criminal incident, merely a set of individual experiences to be resolved, it became an event (*Ereignis*), the *Godhra Hatyakand* (Godhra massacre). An event differs from an incident in that its effects continue long after the initial incident has past. It becomes productive, with structuring effects that elicit symbolic investment and identification in time. It surpasses the incident in part precisely because one was *not* part of the original

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<sup>72</sup>Howard Spodek (1989), Pravin Sheth and Pratab Menon (1986), Asghar Ali Engineer (1989), "Saffron On the Rampage. Gujarat's Muslims pay for Lashkar's Deeds" (2000), "Then they came for the Christians. A report to the nation" (1999).



experience. The “Godhra massacre” did the work of containing representation through communalization, of fixing meanings and relationships to the incident.

President Bush’s famous phrase, invoked in his war on terror, “You are either with us or against us,” is a point in question. In the American case, the violent reaction was largely displaced both outside the borders of the United States into Afghanistan and Iraq, and inside the borders by holding foreign nationals in an internal prison (Guantanamo Bay) that is classified as external. In Gujarat, the effects of this mobilization against terror were acted out systematically only internally by appealing to pre-existing and recurrent patterns of victimization and discrimination. Unlike in the United States, where one could theoretically choose on whose side to stand, in Gujarat, the choice of “perpetrator” or “victim,” Hindu or Muslim, was already made.

The transformation of Godhra from incident into event paid dividends for the BJP in the elections in December 2002, where to the astonishment of many including political analysts, Modi and his BJP were supported by an overwhelming majority. In the election, Modi titled his campaign *Gaurav Yatra*, the pilgrimage of pride. Despite his promises beforehand, and notwithstanding Home Minister L.K. Advani’s denials, the Godhra event was elevated to the supreme issue during the entire Gujarati election campaign. Although Modi’s appeals to the Godhra incident were largely indirect, Godhra was referred to at the contemporaneous functions of the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) directly as often as possible offering another example for the division of labor between organizations of the *Sangh Parivar*.

In short, within days of the Godhra violence, through the role of print media the meaning of *ghatna* (incident) was transformed into *hatyakand* (massacre). This transformation was reflected in the initial and temporary disappearance of the term *akasmat* (accident) and *tofan* (mischief, tumult, battle), the latter of which reappeared

later in the media in order to represent what was a systematic pogrom as the usual “riots.” In revisiting my own ethnographic notes, I was astonished to find that I actually heard the term *akasmāt* (accident) still in use on the day the Godhra carnage was reported and people began to discuss the incident all over the city. For many residents of Ahmedabad from different religious background, it was still an open question whether the incident would cause further violence. It is because of this temporal delay of meaning (*in Wartestellung sein*), a sort of peace before the storm, that the significance of newspaper reports can be gauged. Given what happened next, two years later, another, less violent sequence of events has indeed become hard to imagine.

### 3.2.2 The tale of the invisible women

On the front page of Sandesh, on February 28, 2002, situated in a central box (below Modi’s assertion that the Godhra incident was not a communal incident), a short but very significant report is titled, “Religiously zealous mob abducts 10-15 Hindu girls out of train bogies.”<sup>73</sup> The common compound verb *uthaavi javu* means literally “to pick up and walk away, to steal.” The verb is also often used for marital elopement, that is, “to run away (with a woman),”<sup>74</sup> a phenomena not uncommon in a society where inter-caste marriages can translate into serious inter community trouble. After the title the box reports that, “Only one kilometer from Godhra station where *kar sevako* of Sabarmati Express along with women and children were attacked in a demonic collective massacre by a religiously zealous crowd (*saamuhik pishaachi hatyakadhnaa saathe saathe dharmjhanuni tolu*), 10-15 Hindu young women (girls, *yuvatio*) were abducted from the bogies (...).” The sentence brings into play the word

<sup>73</sup>Sandesh, February 28, 2002, front page. The article has the title: “*Relvenaa dabbamathi 10 thi 15 Hindu yuvatione khechi kadhine uthavi jatu darmjhanuni tolu.*”

<sup>74</sup>cf. TMGED. *Uthaav* means demand, elevation, swelling, imagination. In the causative form *uthaadvu* it means to erect, to raise, to awaken, to arouse, thus has strong sexual connotations.

*pishaachi*, in its adjectival form meaning ‘ghost-like,’ ‘demonic’ or ‘devilish.’ As a noun the term means ‘she-demon,’ a female ghost. Taking this fact into consideration another possible translation might be “(...) during the massacre *kar sevako* of Sabarmati Express were attacked by a group of evil ghosts as part of a religiously zealous crowd” (*saamuhik pishaachi hatyakadhnaa saathe saathe dharmjhanuni tolu*).

The text continues to report that in the entire town of Godhra people talk about the collective massacre (*saamuhik hatyakandh*) and the abduction of the girls. Those travelers that escaped this inhuman slaughter (*aamaanushi hatyakandh*) would also add to the evidence (*samartan*, proof, support) of the incident through *vaatchit* (conversation, chat). As long as the police did not find out who these girls are and how many were taken, the atmosphere in Godhra remains tense (*havaamaa baachki bhari rahi chhe*), the author claims. These girls, who were unloaded alive by the mob from a compartment of the train, have been saved only in order to entrap them (*sapdai gai*, literally ensnared). There was no possibility for them to resist (*inkar thai shaakto nathi*). The VHP in-charge, Kaushik Patel, the report continues, openly made the accusation (*aakshep*) that Hindu girls were abducted (*uthavi javai chhe*) and no one knows their *patto* (addresses, whereabouts).

In another article on page 16, under the pictures of traumatized victims of the Godhra incident with bandages and crying kin (most of them female) an “eye-witness account” of a *karsevak* from Bapunagar, (a highly sensitive area in East-Ahmedabad) is incorporated. The article claims that during the planned attack (*purvayojit kaavtaru*, formerly arranged intrigue), 8-10 women were forcefully snatched away by a mob, referred to as *shaytano* (devils, satans) in the title.<sup>75</sup> The article is subtitled, “Mob dragged away 8-10 women into the *jhupadapatti* (slum hutments).” It is claimed that a group of women were shouting for help but that no one came to help them. The

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<sup>75</sup>Sandesh, February 28, 2002, p.16. “Aaththi das mahilaone tolu *jhupadapattimaa khechi gayu chhe*,”

article continues that the VHP informed Sandesh that when the train was still at the platform in Godhra, the Ram devotees (*raambhaktoe*) started to sing “Jay Shri Ram” (*raamghunni sharuaat kari*, lit. started incantations) and that’s why the atmosphere turned sour and excitement was spread (*vaataavarannmaa uttejna chhevai*).<sup>76</sup> Only one kilometer after the train had left the station, the “evil plotters” (*kaavtaraakhoroe*, intrigue-makers) pulled the emergency chain. Once the train had stopped out of the surrounding areas the attackers came, an estimated 2000-2500 “satans” in the form of a mob (*shaitaano tolaanaa svarupmaa*) who started throwing stones at the train. In another adjacent box, a family from Amraivadi that includes three women is described as having been made into “martyrs” (*shahidi*). In the title they are described as having been made into “sacrificial offerings to beasts” (*tran mahilao hevaaniyatno bhog bani*, literally, “three women made into a beast’s sacrifice”).<sup>77</sup>

The text contains some comical moments that give us pause, as, in retrospect, they have had very serious effects. For one, these articles highlight the “magical” quality of rumor as that which can never be contradicted because it could always be true. The most urgent question posed has to do with the whereabouts of the abducted women. The article claims that the “evidence” (*samartan*) that women were abducted in the first place is given by *vaatchit* (talk, chatter). The talk and chatter is that of surviving travelers and the people in the town of Godhra. Some *karsevako* or other travelers have, it seems, voiced the concern that women were abducted, yet the article offers no clue as to *why* they think the women were abducted in the first place. They

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<sup>76</sup>In other words the atmosphere changed just because Ram devotees were innocently giving praises to Lord Ram.

<sup>77</sup>The term *bhog* has a fascinating semantic circumference expressing quite clearly the inherent conflicts of consumption. Its meaning encompasses “an enjoyment,” “an object of enjoyment,” as well as “a suffering” (GUCD). It can mean pleasure, sexual enjoyment, as well eating and devouring (cf. TMGED). It includes pleasure but it also means Prithal sacrifice, an offering to God (*prasaad*), affliction, misfortune, an evil. It is related to the very common *bhojan* (dinner, food) and *bhojay* (an object of enjoyment, an eatable). Whereas *bhog aapvo* means to sacrifice, *bhog levo* means to enjoy possession, to accept as an oblation (TMGED). The term *bhog* thus plays semantically with two positions here, which are both expressed in one word, a) the victim of consumption (afflicted by misfortune), and b) the consumer who devours the former (deriving pleasure and enjoyment).

were not witnesses, and no evidence other than talk or chatter (*vaatchit*) is summoned to support the claim. Who told them, for instance, that someone was missing? The police, also, are unable to report how many women were abducted, who they were, and where they are. The VHP functionary Kaushik Patel also does not know the young women's names, addresses, and whereabouts, though he nonetheless complains about the "abduction."

Another form of "evidence" is given by the *karsevak* on the paper's last page (on page 16). The "slum hutments" (*jhupadapatti*) are the residential areas around the Godhra railway station of the incredibly poor Ghanchi Muslim community accused of attacking the train and accused of being responsible for the entire incident. The *karsevak* heard women crying out for help and makes the statement that "no help ever came to them" (...*temni madade koi aavyu na hatu* [sic!]). But he does not know who they were either.

It is not surprising that at some point after the Godhra incidence there must have been confusion and chaos about who was killed and who survived, and about who was on the train. That is the nature of any catastrophe, whether terrorist attack, earthquake, or plane crash. But it seems that the victims themselves were allowed to transform this chaos into a plot. In lieu of the police, VHP members took charge of the situation and managed the subsequent emplotment of missing women into a tale of abduction. As we will see below in another version of the same plot, even the silence of the police itself becomes part of the plot of the missing women. The story quickly took on several lives. No policeman seems courageous enough to say that as long as we do not know *who* was missing, we do not know *if* someone was missing. Thus it remained in the realm of the possible that these women were saved from the fire intentionally in order to be abducted by a "religiously zealous crowd."

The abducted women present an emerging narrative, a tale told not on the basis of evidence but its very opposite: constructed around the lack of evidence. It is the very absence of knowledge about the identity and whereabouts of the women, which makes it possible to believe that they must have been abducted (since they are not there). The mere assumption of the presence of women makes possible the claim of women missing and having been martyred. We know today that these abducted women never existed. We still do not know how, precisely, the fire started inside the bogies and who was responsible for it. But we *do* know that there were no women ever abducted from the bogies of the Sabarmati Express. It was merely a “rumor,” spread either intentionally or in the confusion of the moment. Perhaps someone panicked looking for relatives on the railway platform and complained that someone is missing in the chaos of the moment. But we do know that VHP leaders added spin to the rumor and that other members of the VHP “heard voices.”

The absurdity of the situation is that the very absence of the young women becomes the “evidence” that they were there, that is, that they were abducted (that they are now no longer there). The fact that they did not exist becomes the evidence that they must have been abducted, because they are no longer there and no one knows who they are or where they are. In Sandesh this tale is given the stamp of truth and distributed as “information” in homes throughout Gujarat. Its editor-in-chief, Falgun Patel, explained this policy bluntly in an interview to the Editors Guild of India in 2002: Sandesh has “no ethics or principles” and its policy was “not to carry corrections and clarifications.” While the English press supposedly sided with the minorities, Patel insisted that the main competitor Gujarat Samachar had a “pro-Jain bias,” and his own duty was “Hindu protection.”<sup>78</sup> In this way the print media circulates a rumor that becomes a rationale for revenge.

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<sup>78</sup>RW, p. 8.

Since the abducted women are never present, they function like ghosts. Ghosts are beings with the quality of being invisible, but these ghosts are both present and invisible on several levels. On the one hand, there are women who have disappeared because no one saw them or knows their addresses, but everyone assumes they existed and were abducted. In rural Gujarat, women who die an unnatural death in early age become *pishaachi* and their angry spirits are feared.<sup>79</sup> The traditional term *pishaachi* used for ghost literally means “female ghost.” But then, there are the *pishaachi* who kidnapped the female victims. Invisible female beings are said to kidnap women who turn out not to be there anymore either. The article presents the confusing tale of women who disappeared, the evidence for which is that no one has seen them. And then there are the abductors, the devilish and ghost-like attackers who are referenced as *pishaachi*, female ghosts.

The word *pishaach* is not used for ghost, because *pishaach* can be male as well as genderless.<sup>80</sup> It is only at the end of the text, in the last line, that the ghosts are suddenly made male. In what appears to be an afterthought, after the article was nearly complete, the author needed to make sure that the reader not confuse the

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<sup>79</sup>A female ghost haunted part of a dried up *talav* (pond) near Gotarka for several years to the dismay of many villagers, who therefore avoided the area. Gotarka is a village in Banaskantha, in which I spent several months in 1995/96. Villagers explained to me, that an unmarried young woman (a Hindu) of a nearby neighboring village had been raped and killed at the pond by a young man (a Muslim) of the same village. Some villagers claimed to see her at night others disagreed and said you can never see a ghost. All agreed that the spirit was so angry because she had been killed before being able to mother a child. The entire Muslim community of the neighboring village (Dehgam) consequently left, most settling in the nearby town of Varahi. I visited the remaining ruins of their homes, which at the time still were left unoccupied and talked to a local policeman. My initial interest in the incident was naïve but my questions still met with sudden stiff resistance from all sides. A bright young man who had told me of the incident and taken me to the ruins was severely chastised for this by a Swamiji and a Muslim Pir, both the local religious authorities. After these reactions I did not think it wise to pry into the case any further. The incident is also mentioned in Sheth (1998:115).

<sup>80</sup>In a general discussion of supernatural being amongst the Chamar caste, Briggs defines the term “*pisach*” as “[A] demon resulting from a man’s vices, and is in reality the spiritual embodiment of some vice, as the lying spirit, the thief spirit, and the like, or the spirit of insanity” (1920:132). In the context of “Raksasa marriage” (1954:169), a marriage by capture, which was practiced by warriors in ancient times, Basham mentions “Paisaca marriage” and he classifies “*pisaca*” (“goblin”) as less terrible compared to the Raksasa (319). Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty references “fierce, flesh-eating pisacas” as an incarnation of Brahma’s anger (1976:52). In addition to definitions in Gujarati dictionaries, the term “*pishach*” is also mentioned in Daya (1849: 10, 11), and Forbes (1997[1878]: 391).

attackers with the victims, and to do this, resorts to a gendering of the abductors. It should be understood that these *pishaachi*, who so inhumanly abducted the girls, were really “male ghosts” (that is, demons). After using *pishaachi* throughout the entire text, the author suddenly employs *narpishaacho* by adding the prefix ‘*nar*’ in the last line of the report indicating that it is “male ghosts” who abducted the women. Instead of simply using *pishaach*, he insists on *narpishaacho*. Why?

As if implicitly acknowledging the possible confusion created by summoning several invisible female entities in his own report, the author adds, in the form of a prefix--*nar*, a maleness to the abductors. To leave the term as *pishaach*, which could be male *or* neuter (that is, neither male nor female gender), might destroy the insinuation of a sexual motive to the abductor, an allusion that the entire article is trying to summon up. Rape and the sexual violation of women are central to the imaginary grid employed in the pogrom of 2002. In other articles (page 16, for example) the problem is solved by employing the term *shaytaan* (devil, satan) to reference the attackers, a term usually used by Muslims, and unambiguously masculine. The *nar* in *narpishaacho* can communicate the ghost’s gender without any ambiguity, which *pishaach* could not.

This spectral tale of invisible women has a larger significance. The significance does not lie in the confusion between “invisible women” and “female ghosts,” who are really “male demons” abducting Hindu women who then might return to haunt as *pishaachi*. It lies in the total effects this tale has on the streets of Ahmedabad that day. Throughout the entire day of February 28, 2002, a day of terrible violence in Ahmedabad, especially against Muslim women, I was told repeatedly about the women who were assumed to have been there, the abducted women. When I tried to discuss with young men why they were throwing stones into Muslim shops, they said that these young Hindu women (*yuvatio*), as reported in



Sandesh, were nowhere to be seen, that they were taken from the bogies, and that they were probably raped, and then hacked and killed. “Where do *you* think they are?” I was asked when I showed disbelief. Especially young men elaborated the point that the missing girls have been used for “*enjoy*,”<sup>81</sup> and then simply cast away and killed (“*enjoy mate, pachhi feki de chhe ane maari naakhe chhe. Bas.*”).

Whereas the fight between notoriously aggressive Hindu *karsevaks* on their way back from the temple town of Ayodhya and the infamous Ghanchi Muslims of Godhra--ghetto dwellers of Signal Falia--makes perfect sense to many Gujaratis, the abduction of young Hindu women is unacceptable. Abduction of women evokes an imagery of excessive expenditure, of “*enjoy*,” by accessing secret sexual fantasies. These “ghost victims” were used to legitimize acting out violence. Retaliation seemed necessary because the most heinous of crimes was the live abduction of innocent Hindu girls. Motivating the tale of these missing women, these female ghosts, was outrage over the idea that Muslims had the audacity to abduct women for sexual pleasures. The anger on the street, directed against a putative “*joy*,” also took the curious form of joy and fun, as I described in the preceding chapter.

Besides orally transmitted rumors, several fact-finding commissions report similar stories from the front page of Sandesh newspapers on the same day (citing different editions). Some of these stories go even further by claiming that the mutilated bodies of two murdered girls have actually been found in Kalol. Here, the

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<sup>81</sup>The English term “*enjoy*” taken from the very successful Coke commercial “ENJOY, ENJOY” that entered India some time in the 1990s is often used in a Gujarati sentence in order to express “pleasure” and especially “consumption.” It is used in “*enjoy leva mate*” to describe an afternoon or evening at the movie theater or vegetarian Pizza Hut, as much as illicit and licit sexual relations for the sake of pleasure (pre-marital as well as marital sex, prostitution, rape, homosexuality). “Enjoy” carries some sense of pleasure but for no particular reason, thus implying a wasteful expenditure. The strong ambivalence of enjoyment is much clearer in the Gujarati verb *bhogavavu*, which means “to enjoy, to use,” but also “to suffer” and “to undergo.” The term *bhog* can mean pleasure and sexual enjoyment as much as a sacrificial offering (victim) and when used as *bhog aapvo*, to sacrifice. Compare also footnote 77 above.

unanswered question of the whereabouts of the missing women is answered by  
 “bodies found.” The *Concerned Citizens Tribunal* translates,

“Vadodara, Thursday: News about the dead bodies of two girls, abducted from the bogies during the attack on the Sabarmati express yesterday, found in a mutilated and terribly disfigured form near a pond in Kalol, has added fuel to the already volatile situation of tension, not only in Panchmahal, but in the whole state. In an act of inhumanity that would make even a devil weep, both girls had their breasts cut off. It is evident from the dead bodies that the victims had been repeatedly raped. There is speculation that the girls might have died because of gross sexual abuse.”<sup>82</sup>

*Communalism Combat* reprinted a longer version of the same article from Sandesh. I add only the missing lines of their translation,

“The police, however, have kept quiet and have not spoken about the sensitive event. On account of that, various speculations during an already tense situation are like adding ghee to the fire. According to the talk heard during the night one more dead body of a girl, also in a terribly mutilated form, had been found. After being raped and mutilated, the body of the woman was set on fire with petrol. Is there no limit to the lust?”<sup>83</sup>

Here it is claimed, that a third body has been found. The police’s silence is also added to an emerging plot by arguing that the treatment of these women was so barbaric that the police chose to remain silent in order not to cause even more tension. What the police supposedly do not speak about in order not to cause even more tension, Sandesh simply reports without qualms—we might ask: in order to cause tension? In this version the newspaper does not even have to bother to crosscheck any information because the police “kept quiet,” which becomes not a reason for caution but convenience. Sandesh has no problem reporting the very silence of the police as evidence for the sheer barbarity of an act that the police will neither affirm nor deny. Again, the absence of evidence becomes part of the process of creating evidence in an emerging plot. Indeed, Sandesh, as a local Indian idiom would put it, “adds ghee to

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<sup>82</sup>CCT, Vol. II, p. 133.

<sup>83</sup>GG, p. 127.

the fire.” There are many Indian expressions for “adding ghee to fire,” (e.g. *homavvu*, offering oblations). That act is itself an invocation of a sacrifice. It is itself a sacrificial act. It feeds and increases the fire, in this case the fire of communal passion. Indeed, there is no limit to the lust.

This emergence of sexual fantasies (of “lust”) was not limited to Sandesh newspaper. The other of the two largest Gujarati-vernacular papers, Gujarat Samachar, also carried on its front page an article titled “3-4 young girls have been kidnapped.” Again the report gives neither names of the missing nor any other details. Again, there is no need felt to cross check with the IGP or railway police. The lack of certitude of information is supplemented by more insinuation on page ten, where VHP leader Kaushik Patel is quoted as saying, that ten girls were kidnapped and on page two an eyewitness is cited, “Young girls from Amraiwadi traveling with us are lost.”<sup>84</sup> Variations of the same tale are reported in several villages in Panchmahal with a large tribal population, where Adivasi women were allegedly abducted for pleasure by Muslims and raped in a local *madrassa* (Islamic school), and in another version in a local *masjid* (mosque). These stories are spread through rumors and according to one investigative report almost assumed “proportions of folklore.”<sup>85</sup>

Today these accounts testify to the operation of an imaginary grid. The police found all of these reports to be entirely baseless. But their efficacy did not rest in their veracity. Particularly during the first three days of pogroms in central Gujarat, the tale of the invisible women expressed sexual fantasies that were mimetically constructed. What is imagined will be acted out, not on invisible women, but on

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<sup>84</sup>Unfortunately, I was not able to acquire a personal copy of the original article. I rely thus on “Violence in Vadodara: A Report.” People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Vadodara and Vadodara Shanti Abhiyan, p. 142. The report, on the women of Amraiwadi however, sounds almost identical to the Sandesh report on page 16 (see description above), of the same day. This poses the serious question if the two newspapers are not only deliberately competing in circulating false rumors, but are actually exchanging the same flawed material, and derive the concocted stories from the same flawed sources.

<sup>85</sup>The Citizen’s Initiative Ahmedabad (CI) published a good summary of the depictions of sexual violence against women and the role of the media see *The Survivor’s Speak*, April 2002, p. 10-12.

actual Muslim women of flesh and blood, who will be in turn made to be “invisible.” The evidence of female Muslim bodies, raped and mutilated, will also be systematically destroyed with a disturbing technological sophistication. For many surviving Muslim family members, it will become next to impossible to claim compensation as long as the killed are merely considered “missing.” The bodies of Muslim men and women literally disappeared. I have enumerated some of the concocted descriptions in length because it will become apparent that what was imagined to have been done to Hindu women in Godhra appears to be a precise script of what will be done to Muslim women all over central Gujarat in a mimetic reversal.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2.3 The moving image: *Gadar* and Tara Singh

Before explaining why the movie *Gadar* was referred to in Sandesh the day after the Godhra incident, it is important to understand its background and content. *Gadar* followed in the wake of a craze in the 1990's in Gujarat, and to some extent in all of India, for movies about war and patriotism that emerged with such films as *Border*, *Refugees*, *Terrorist*, and *Sarfarosh*. In *Sarfarosh*, for example, the famous actor Nasiruddin Shah plays a soft-spoken classical Muslim Ghazal singer who carries arms into India on behalf of the ISI (Pakistani Inter-Intelligence Services) and, in the only scene memorable for me, bites off the ear of a young goat. There is a tendency in all of these new movies to fascinate a young male audience with modern pyrotechnical magic, a portrayal of the impenetrable machinations of power, and endless explicit,

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<sup>86</sup>The sexual dimension cannot be underestimated and reappears locally in diverse forms: In 1999 a Marathi Hindu girl named Meena living in Naroda Patia supposedly had an affair and became pregnant with a “handsome” Muslim local boy named Abid. Meena had denied the affair. In September 1999, Meena was mysteriously killed by being burned alive tied to a cot and gagged. She had allegedly committed “suicide.” Abid was arrested. Then Meena’s parents found out that it had been Meena’s cousin that had fathered the child. Abid was consequently bailed out from jail and his family moved away. Muslim residents of the area mention this incident as important for understanding the consequent genesis of violence against Muslims in August 2000. Cf. “Saffron on the Rampage,” p. 12.

gory violence. They often carry definite anti-Islamic messages (always securely hidden as anti-Pakistani propaganda) into the Hindi heartland where they are most successful at the box office.<sup>87</sup> It is in the choice of plot, characters, and stereotypes (characteristic of many Bollywood movies in general) where one can find clear biases. In my experience of many of these films with Indian audiences, young viewers have little doubt they understand the “message” of these movies to be anti-Muslim.

*Gadar* is a Panjabi story of love between the pretty Muslim aristocratic girl Sakina, played by the Gujarati actress Amisha Patel, and a Sikh truck driver Tara Singh, played by Panjabi muscleman Sunny Deol, whom Gujaratis often refer to as “*big body*.”<sup>88</sup> The movie begins during Partition, flashes back to when Sakina and Tara Singh initially met at a Christian convent school, before returning to post-Independence time. Tara Singh is depicted as a simple but honest Jat of rural background, who is made fun of by the young girls of the convent, including Sakina. After Sakina allows him to sing a Panjabi folk song at an annual convent function to the initial dismay of the Christian teachers (portrayed as sycophants to the Western guests seated high up in the ranks in colonial attire), Tara Singh secretly falls in love with her (but never reveals his feelings).

During Partition Tara Singh’s family is betrayed by the Pakistani government and has to flee Lahore to Amritsar, where Tara Singh awaits them at the train station. The father gives his two pretty young daughters little paper folders with poison so they may take their own lives before a possible Muslim attacker would take their honor (that is, rape them). The overcrowded train at the Pipla station has only eight bogies for 10,000 passengers. When masses of people try to board the train, it is attacked by an armed Muslim mob shouting “Allahu Akbar.” A young bearded Muslim with a

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<sup>87</sup>“Popular Cinema and Conflicts in South Asia” by Jaganath Guha, <http://www.himalmag.com/march2001/analysis.html>, viewed July 2, 2004.

<sup>88</sup>*Gadar. Ek Prem Katha*. Directed by Anil Sharma, 2001.

bloodstained *kurta*, black *topi*, and a sword in his hand, shouts, “Butcher and kill the old and the children. Pick up the Hindus. Do not leave anyone alive.” The Muslims, armed with swords, attack the hapless victims in the overcrowded train, killing the men and raping the women before killing them also. While defending his family in the narrow compartment, the Sikh father is killed with a single sword stroke. The mother manages to stab one of the attackers with a small knife while defending her daughter. In the last scene, a man starts raping one of the daughters, over her agonized screams, after she was not able to swallow the poison that her father had given her.

“In this way the dead corpses of Hindus and Sikhs from different parts of Pakistan were sent to Hindustan,” explains the narrator in a dramatically echoing voice. The ghostly train with hundreds of slain Sikhs and Hindus arrives in Amritsar at night. Bloody corpses are bizarrely hanging out of windows or lying on top of the train. In one picture the movie shows a barely recognizable bloody cadaver. The train arrives in Amritsar and the relatives of the slain who awaited their kin are reduced to silence. The reddened eyes of the movie’s hero Tara Singh waiting at the train station—realizing that his sisters, father, mother are dead—capture an Urdu message scribbled in dripping blood on the train. Translated into Hindi subtitles for the audience, it reads: “Hindustanis learn killing from us.”

With “Jai Shri Akaal” and the characteristically frenzied scream that Sunny Deol (alias Tara Singh) will emit throughout the entire movie to impersonate the angry Sikh, the revenge killings and the burning of Muslim homes in India begins and unfold in the following scenes. In a reversal of the scenes across the new border, the train station in Amritsar is now filled with fleeing Muslims and murderous Sikhs and Hindus. In the chaos Tara and Sakina suddenly meet eye to eye and Tara stops short killing her with his sword. He subsequently awakens somewhat from his frenzy. Sakina, who at the same time tries to flee in the opposite direction to Pakistan, gets

separated from her family in the chaos at the train station. At night a mob discovers her and tries to rape and kill her. Fleeing through a refugee camp past piles of bearded, severed heads, she encounters the hero Tara Singh.

Tara, who catches the strike of a sword with his bare hands, smacks attackers with one hand while holding Sakina in the other to prevent anyone from approaching her. The angry crowd shouts, “She is a Muslim! She is a Muslim!” By using the blood from his injured hand Tara Singh puts a *tilak (sindoor)* on her forehead and says, “She’s a Muslim? Well, now she is a Sikh.” Then he warns them, “Now, whoever looks at her I swear I will cut off his head.” Having symbolically made Sakina his wife, he walks off with his booty. Having witnessed the transformation of a “*mussalmani*” into a “*sikhni*,” the puzzled mob lets him pass with Sakina.

While Tara initially tries to help Sakina escape to Pakistan, she eventually returns his love, marrying a simple farmer, and giving birth to a Sikh son. After years of blissful marriage she realizes by coincidence that her Muslim parents and family are still alive and live across the border in Pakistan. She visits them with the permission of her husband, but her father Mr. Ashraf, an influential politician played by Amrish Puri, wants her to annul the embarrassing marriage to the Sikh peasant and to remarry a local Muslim. Tara Singh has to travel illegally to Pakistan to get back his wife as Mr. Ashraf sabotages the attempt to get a visa legally. Traveling illegally without visa over the border, Tara is helped by an old Muslim neighbor and friend Gulkhan from his home village for whom Tara is like a brother. In *Gadar*, “Gullabhai” is the good Muslim, a harmless fellow with a wife who dominates him and too many children who keep nagging at him.

Tara arrives together with his son at the elaborate marriage ceremony just in time to stop the remarriage of his wife. The father of Sakina agrees to accept Sakina’s first marriage only if Tara converts to Islam and remains in Pakistan. In the

penultimate scene, Tara, wife, and son are surrounded by hundreds of Muslims in front of a mosque. An overjoyed and zealous Qazi welcomes Tara and asks him if he is ready to embrace Islam. Tara responds that the greatest religion of a man is the protection of his family. The Qazi asks again. Unenthusiastically, the hero recites the typical “*ram aur rahim ek hai,*”<sup>89</sup> eviscerating all distinctions between religions of which the over zealous Qazi is not amused, as he wants an unambiguous embrace of Islam. Tara Singh finally agrees.

In the movie theaters I visited in the old city of Baroda in 2001, it is in this penultimate scene that the audience fell into an absolute silence. Sakina’s father stops the Qazi. Mr. Ashraf demands that before embracing Islam Tara has to prove that he is really worthy to do so. He demands that Tara say “Islam Zindabad” (“Long Live Islam”), then “Pakistan Zindabad” both which Tara repeats without hesitation in a husky voice. Finally, Mr. Ashraf smilingly asks him to say “Hindustan Murdabad” (“Death to Hindustan”), which of course goes too far. Tara shouts at his father-in-law asking him why he is playing this political game. He says he has no objection to praise Pakistan but “my India was, is, and always will be worthy of praise.” Then he repeats three times “Hindustan Zindabad,” which the audience in the theater also repeats. Mr. Ashraf shouts, as long as you cannot curse India, how can “our people” believe that you are a true Muslim?

Tara informs Mr. Ashraf of the fact that if he can genuflect in front of him for the sake of his family he can also chop off his head. In a whirlwind conclusion, Tara Singh, a companion, wife, and son, flee from hundreds of Pakistani soldiers in jeeps and on horses, accompanied by Sakina’s father, in a train back in direction to Rajasthan. Against all odds, the final scene portrays a reconciliation in a military

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<sup>89</sup>“Ram and Rahim are one and the same” is a popular saying in Gujarat and elsewhere to express unity of God beyond all communal differences. *Ram* is the Hindu divinity of the Ramayana, *Rahim* is one of the many names for *Allah*.



camp as the father asks his son-in-law, Tara, for forgiveness, and the father, in turn, apologizes by saying that a son-in-law should be treated like royalty. In his greed for power, he had forgotten humanity.<sup>90</sup>

In 2001, the release of the movie had led to serious trouble in several Indian cities, including Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, and Baroda in Gujarat, where I watched the movie several times. During a night screening of the movie in Ahmedabad, a cinema and some vehicles were set fire on in a Muslim area. Then Minister of State for Home Affairs Haren Pandya “appealed to the people not to disrupt the screening of the ‘nationalist’ film.” Gujarat’s Social Welfare Minister Fakirbhai Vaghela opined in a letter to the Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel that enemy intelligence must be behind the disturbances in Gujarat and elsewhere because, ““No Indian national can have any objection against the film presented in a passionate way to imbibe the spirit of nationalism. It must be the work of anti-national elements guided by the Pakistan spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI),”” Vaghela said. In New Delhi the Shiv Sena (SS) launched a campaign against the opposition to the movie and “demanded an immediate ban on outfits involved in violent protests” against the release of *Gadar*.<sup>91</sup>

The movie could not have gotten better recommendations and all screenings I attended in Baroda were overcrowded, loud, and uncomfortably effervescent, if not bordering on hysteria. When Sunny Deol shouts “Hindustan Zindaband” three times

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<sup>90</sup>There is much more evocative stuff to this movie, but cannot be dealt with in detail here. For example, a fool of funny character appears several times in the movie, who is a Muslim but speaks in the name of truth seen from an Indian perspective. He is a “fool” to his own people but makes sense to the Indian audience. The first time he appears wearing a Nehru cap attacking a “Britisher” as enemy (“*dushman!*”) to the embarrassment of the Pakistani host of Western guests and the amusement of the movie audience. The third time is the very last scene of the movie, where he wears a pious Muslim skullcap and clothing while citing Mahatma Gandhi that the greatest religions is non-violence. Some people have claimed that *Gadar* is the cinematic answer to, and reversal of, *Tere Pyar Mein*, a movie of the newly energized attempts at “Lollywood,” a Pakistani movie industry in Lahore. I have not seen that movie. Lahore’s Lollywood is supposed to counter Bombay’s Bollywood, which is, despite all attempts to ban specific movies, widely successful also in Pakistan.

<sup>91</sup>Indian Express June 22, 2001 “*Gadar* runs into trouble in Lucknow too,” p.3; Indian Express June 24, 2001 “Another attack on *Gadar* screening, 10 held,” p.5; The Hindu, June 25, 2001 “Screening of ‘Gadar’ disrupted in Ahmedabad,” p.3.

in one of the penultimate scenes and then battles together with his companion, son, and wife against hundreds of Pakistani attackers, the young men in the theater went berserk. Two folding chairs were broken in front of my eyes by youngsters who jumped up and down on them.

An astonishing frequency of references to *Gadar*--in street conversations and print media --accompanied the Godhra incident. Indeed, in a very short time on the streets of Gujarat, the movie seemed to have become a, if not *the*, referent for imagining the nature of Hindu-Muslim relations. People would not only refer to the movie during interviews and discussions. During endless curfew hours in 2002, I heard its music and dialogues also broadcast into Muslim neighborhoods from adjacent Hindu areas of Ahmedabad. Young men and children could recite by heart not only the songs but especially specific dialogues. During religious festivals like *Ganesh Chaturthi* (*Ganapati Virsarjan*) or marriage functions, too, the music and dialogues are played in neighborhoods. When I visit an artfully constructed *pandal* (sacred installations not unlike the Christian nativity scenes in Catholic countries during Christmas time) in the old city of Baroda in 2001 during *Ganesh Chaturthi*, the entire train scene between Lahore and Amritsar from *Gadar* is carefully depicted under the title "Partition." The *pandal* was introduced to me by a group of proud youngsters, while the dialogues were blasted incredibly loud from loudspeakers the size of little file cabinets. In 2002, during the same festival within the confines of the same neighborhood and by the same *mandal* (neighborhood association), one *pandal* referred to the Godhra incident by depicting the burning Sabarmati Express, despite the explicit prohibition by the police to do so.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>To showcase in creative installations the God Ganesh (son of Parvati and Shiva) together with other themes like the Kargil War in 2000, *Gadar* in 2001, or Godhra in 2002, has become a tradition only recently in Western India. The festival itself goes back to the popular Maharashtrian nationalist Lokmanya Tilak (1856-1920) who joined the Indian National Congress and was replaced after his death by Mahatma Gandhi. The festival right from its inception was designed to oppose the British and fuel the Independence struggle by highlighting indigenous culture and instilling national integrity. The

During the 2002 election campaign, Narendra Modi's *Gaurav Yatra* mentioned earlier, used tunes from *Gadar* as BJP election songs, though with altered lyrics. In one song, amongst others, the immensely popular "*Main nikla gaddi leke*," becomes "I am a BJP soldier,"<sup>93</sup> while at the *Hindu Pat Padsahi Yatra* launched parallel by the VHP late in 2002 to Modi's *Gaurav Yatra*, replicas of the burning Sabarmati Express in Godhra are displayed.<sup>94</sup>

During the two-day *bandh* between February and March 2002, which saw the worst anti-Muslim violence, the broadcasts of television news by BBC and Star News was completely blocked at times (supposedly, people said, because of "inciting news coverage" of the violence), while local cable channels repeatedly aired *Gadar*. On March 15, 2002, the day of the Ayodhya *yagna* (sacrifice), where violence was expected to re-erupt, *Gadar* was again aired. During this time, I was often the guest of Gujarati middle-class families in Naranpura and Ambavadi, who were afraid to walk in the streets of Ahmedabad and continually warned me not to do so. I suspect that for many the bloody violent sequences of *Gadar*, including the train massacres during Partition, served as a script for imagining what happened a few days prior at cabin 'A' in Godhra.<sup>95</sup>

The movie plays an important role in *Sandesh* on February 28, 2002, also. An article on page 7 under the headline, "Is the ISI implicated in the attack on Sabarmati express?"<sup>96</sup> underscores Modi's statements from the front page informing Gujaratis what they are confronting. The article not only claims bluntly that no one doubts that

*mandals* responsible for the *pandals* are often in a fierce creative competition with neighboring ones, cf. "Rewind to Godhra, this Ganeshotsav," *Times of India* September 5, 2002, front page. For depictions during Janmashtami 2002 compare "Godhra tableau, floats draw visitors," by Hiral Dave, *The Indian Express*, September 2, 2002, p.5, and a photo without article in *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2002.

<sup>93</sup>One of these BJP election songs played during Narendra Modi's "Gaurav Yatra" can be heard in Rakesh Sharma's documentary "Final Solution" (2004).

<sup>94</sup>*Times of India* November 13, 2002, "VHP will display replicas of burning bogie."

<sup>95</sup>Between February 28 and March 15, 2002, I personally witnessed *Gadar* screened on TV four times. But the movie was shown even more often.

<sup>96</sup>*Sandesh* February 28, 2002, p. 7. "*saabarmati Ekshpress parna humlaamaa aai-es-aai sandovani?*"

the Godhra attack indeed was “pre-planned” (*purva yojit*, lit. formerly arranged), and that ISI involvement (*ISI ni sandovani*) has become a “strong possibility” (*majbut shakyata*), but also that the attack method (*dhab*) the killers used was inspired by the movie *Gadar*.

It then goes on to say that the difference between the train massacres at the time of Partition and the one in Godhra is simply that the trains in 1947 arrived with bodies soaked in blood (*lohithi lathpath laasho jova maalti*) whereas the corpses arriving on February 27, 2002, were bloody and also strongly charred. Godhra was selected for the attack because the railway station was surrounded by minority areas on all four sides (*laghumati vistarthi chare tarafthi derayelu chhe*), which permits a quick escape after the deed. As I read Sandesh that day, I had already lived an entire year in Gujarat. I had talked about communal violence and Partition with residents many times. No one ever mentioned the “bodies soaked in blood” of Partition before, let alone those depicted in the Bollywood movies that young men watch with gusto. In fact, people were much more eager to talk about the 1969 Ahmedabad riots than about Partition, as those riots had a deeper impact on inner city relations between Hindus and Muslims. One of the most devastating effects of the 1969 “riots” in Ahmedabad’s inner city was the beginning of large-scale inner-city migration and segregation into Hindu and Muslim areas. Living in mixed neighborhoods came to be experienced as a potential risk in times of communal tension. The risk was not necessarily because of one’s immediate neighbor of the other community, but because of the helplessness of neighbors vis-à-vis their own self-proclaimed aggressive protectors. It led many Hindus and Muslims to choose a segregated neighborhood of their own respective community. Many Hindus became residents in the new Satellite suburbs of West-Ahmedabad and many Muslims migrated to ghettos such as

Juhapura.<sup>97</sup> Partition violence was directly experienced only by the migrant Sindhi community in Gujarat and not by the mainstream communities in Gujarat itself.

In most reporting on violence in India, there is usually some reference to the *modus operandi* of the ISI (Pakistani Inter-Intelligence Services). *Sandesh* suggests this connection with reference to the “chain pulling” (always cited in English), which brought the train to a stop a kilometer away from the train station, precisely within a minority area. Also suggesting the ISI is the sudden appearance of diesel and petrol and the information that 3000 *karsevako* (Hindu volunteers) were on their way back from Ayodhya. In a little box adjacent to the article, it asks if the police station has the *himat* (courage) to engage in “combing operations” since Muslims living in this area, Signal Falia, are assumed to be particularly dangerous.

Reference to the movie *Gadar* and Partition reappears on page 16, in an article called, *Hindustaan naa bhaaglaa vakhate karaayeli katleaamnaa dhrashiyo yad karaavyaa* (“Memories of the slaughter during Hindustan’s division emerge”). The article argues that the incidents in Godhra reminded an older generation of the time of the division of Hindustan (“*Hindustaan naa bhagala*,” lit. the breaking of Hindustan). In exactly the same way trains were sent from Pakistan full of slaughtered Hindus (*katleaam karine*, literally, a general slaughter or massacre of people). A younger generation, the article asserts, knows this from the movie *Gadar*. While in the past Hindus were considered *kafir* (unbelievers) by extremist Muslims, the situation would be different today as Hindus are treated like *kafir* by politicians instead (“*te vakhate kattar Muslimo mate Hinduo kafir jata. Aaje rajkaraniyo mate te kafir hoy tevi stithi chhe*”).

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<sup>97</sup>During field research I meet many middle class Hindus who used to live in inner city areas. At a dinner in Vastrapur in Fall 2002 a 63 year-old Brahman tells me emotionally about his childhood and youth in Jamalpur. He remembers street names, *paan* shops, and the names of many old Muslim friends he has not seen for years. He used to visit the Shah Alam Dargah for *darshan* many times, which is not far from Jamalpur. Today, he would never set foot in Jamalpur, nor the Shah Alam area.

The writer also boldly asserts that it was established (*saabit thayu chhe*) that such barbarities as witnessed during Partition--when “heaps of corpses of Hindus were piled up in the trains” and “mountain of girl’s corpses” were sent from Pakistan--were not only coming from Pakistan. It is time to ask politicians the question what “they” are doing here in Hindustan (“*teo Hindustanmaa shu kare chhe?*”). The article closes by accusing politicians of inaction in not revealing the “power brokers” (*sattani dalaali*) while the people are demanding a hero, a *virnaayak*, like hero Tara Singh from the movie *Gadar*.<sup>98</sup>

On page 2 of the same issue of Sandesh there is a short article with the dramatic title “*taalvaarni anie trennaa draaivarne haijek karaayo...!!*” (“In the moment of crisis the driver of the train was hijacked with swords...!!”),<sup>99</sup> Dholka leader Rajendra Shah is quoted as saying that the shameless attack (*humlo nilarjaj che*) will be avenged in equal terms (*khunno badla khunthi*, the return for blood is blood), and that this time the Hindu population will be organized (*sagthit banvu padshe*). Survivors Manoj Patel, Mina Rajput and others are paraphrased saying that, “For us, this is a new birth” (*navo janm che*, lit. a new life-time). The *ramsevako* (devotees of Ram) explain, “What we have experienced we will never be able to forget” (*ame je kai anubhavyu chhe te kyaarey bhuli shakie tem nathi*). They continue, that it was such a spectacle (*drashyo*, lit. sight, visible object, phenomena) as we had seen and dreaded in the *Gadar* film (*dhruji uthavvu*, to shiver and tremble).<sup>100</sup>

“We have seen and experienced with our own eyes,” “*Te najare joya – anubhavya che*, the article continues. This can also be translated as “We have experienced that which we had seen with our own eyes.” The compound verb *najare*

<sup>98</sup>The term *sattani dalaali* (brokers of power) is ambivalent, appearing to mean simply “police” but also it might very well refer idiomatically to the VHP, RSS, and BD who are seen by many people in Gujarat as the real powers behind the scene.

<sup>99</sup>Sandesh February 28, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup>The entire sentence goes “*aavaa drashyo ame ‘gadar’ filmmaa joyaa hataa ne dhruji uthayaa hata.*”

*jovu* means to have a personal look, to see with one's own eyes. "Brandishing swords openly," it continues, "a mob came and from the neighboring carriage and four young women were abducted" (*uthavi gaya hata*, lit. to run away with a woman, to steal).

Although the title suggests that the train driver was "hijacked" (*haijek karaayo*) by a crowd armed with swords, this is never substantiated or even discussed in the article. The driver of the Sabarmati Express train was never hijacked, nor is it clear if any Muslims of Signal Falia were carrying swords. In fact, most reports describe them as throwing stones and probably never even entering the train. Although it is very unlikely that the described scene ever happened, it is cursorily stated once in the title and once in the text. The word "vision" (*drashyo*) has to be understood literally here. The most plausible explanation of the *drashyo* seen was the en-visioning of the movie scenes of *Gadar*. In the movie not only are the drivers attacked ("hijacked") and piles of bloody corpses depicted hanging out of bogie windows, but Muslims are also brandishing swords when entering train compartments raping and killing. It is as if the victims here remember what they have just experienced in the colors and shape of the movie *Gadar*. At the very least, the unguarded reference to *Gadar* confirms that the movie on Partition has become part of the imaginary script of Godhra and the Gujarat pogroms that followed.

Since several other articles in this issue of Sandesh describe the details of Godhra, it is likely that the primary function of this article on page 2 is to invoke and reinforce the pictures of the movie. It serves the purpose of dramatizing what we already know from page one, that Hindu women were abducted. The article does not provide any new information but simply returns to the insinuations about the abduction of young Hindu girls, this time citing the "leader of Dholka," who is not even identified as a VHP leader, although in fact he is precisely that. He claims he saw four girls being abducted.

In sum, all articles examined here communicate the same picture, though in different arrangements, but always with the same tools: survivors who all happen to be *ram sevaks* and *kar sevaks* (temple construction volunteers) are questioned and in the absence of words to express the terror, they describe their horrific experiences by reference to the movie *Gadar*. Time and again the train scenes of the *Gadar* movie are brought together with the idea of abduction of girls from the train in Godhra and the specter of Partition. Surely, this is not a coincidence.

This last, short article from page 2 is noteworthy for actually saying what it does: “*te najare joya – anubhavya chhe.*” “We have experienced that which we had seen with our own eyes.” This is another way of saying that that which could be seen in the movie *Gadar* we have now experienced in Godhra. In this way the commercial movie *Gadar* becomes the imaginary grid for the Godhra incident. The symbolic labor one can witness here has the effect, and the intent, to mobilize the specter of Partition and an imagery that many Gujaratis actually *have* experienced in seeing the movie *Gadar*.<sup>101</sup>

The word imagery throughout Sandesh is generally one of sacrifice, blood, revenge, and martyrdom and while pretending to describe violence, the paper is actually mobilizing it. Most newspapers in Gujarat refrain from referring to communities explicitly as “Muslim” or “Hindu.”<sup>102</sup> Through the absence of any Muslim voice in the reports and by simultaneously stressing the “Hindu” of the victims so vigorously, Sandesh is referencing a “spectral Muslim” all the more which

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<sup>101</sup>The movie *Gadar* and the “abducted women” are referred to twice on page 14 of the same newspaper in a similar way. There is nothing to be added from those references, thus I omit them here. Time and again it is the *drashyo* (vision) of *Gadar*, which is the cinematographic memory of Partition, that is remembered when Godhra is described, narrated, or imagined.

<sup>102</sup>There is also only a scanty reference to the behavior of *kar sevaks* (temple construction volunteers) the provocations meted out to Muslim station vendors in the days preceding the Godhra incident as well as on the Wednesday 27 itself. Sandesh never mentions the immediate humiliations and attacks, such as pulling Muslim beards, stabbing with *trishuls*, overturning Muslim vendor’s shops, and making them say “Jai Shri Ram,” but Times of India at least hints at them.



haunts the entire paper for weeks to come.<sup>103</sup> Once the Muslim is “spectral,” that is absent and present at the same time, he does not have to be addressed, asked, or dealt with as an actual entity. The terms used for the “spectral Muslim” become a fantastic character. Instead of “Muslim” Sandesh substitutes “aroused demons” or “ghosts” (*uthavi jatu pishaachi*), satans (*shaytano*), beast (*hevaaniyat*), anti-social elements (*asamaajik tatvao*), and terrorist (*traasvadi*) who --helped by the demonic activities (*pishaachi pravratiti*) of the ISI-- play its sinister game openly (*khullo khel khelay chhe*) while all India is in “red alert.” The fear of terrorism (the ISI, Pakistani Inter-Intelligence Services) and register of the supernatural are overlapping here. References to the abduction of women and the specter of Partition (*bhaagalaa vakhate*, lit. time of breaking) abound and the later is strangely inflected time and again through references to the commercial Bollywood movie *Gadar* underscoring the spectral quality of Partition.<sup>104</sup>

By proclaiming the Godhra incident to be a sort of “collective terrorism,” Modi consecrates what the VHP has been claiming for many years. The VHP, in turn, promises swift action while accusing *netao* (political leaders) of being too passive. Sandesh, too, repeatedly hints at politicians (*netao*) and the police as being indifferent and incompetent. This culminates in a call for “Tara Singh,” the *virnayaak*, which literally means “He-man,” the virile hero of the movie *Gadar*. Tara is not only virile

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<sup>103</sup> As Varadarajan (2002) points out, once ethnic violence has assumed pogrom character, not mentioning community names does not at all lead to less contagion of violence. It leads to the very opposite. Not mentioning the communities themselves means silencing the reality of victimization of one specific community. The one-sidedness of pogrom violence is not represented creating the impression that the violence is a typical “riot.” The charred and bloody bodies depicted in Sandesh are understood to be bodies of members of communities fighting against each other in some form of parity. Here then, when the very logic of the counter-concept “Hindu-Muslim” has collapsed, it reappears as a veneer to deflect the reality of a one-sided anti-Muslim pogrom.

<sup>104</sup> The temporal sweep back to the time of Independence (*aajhaadi*) brings Partition and not other possible post-Independence events like the 1969 violence, the anti-reservation violence in 1985/86, or the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the subsequent “riots,” into play. There is no mention of the increased communal tension since the BJP took power in Gujarat in 1998, since which the numbers of communal clashes in Gujarat has multiplied. Instead of internal conflict the external enemy country is referred to, and to it, everyone can only assume one single relation and position.

because he can catch a sword stroke with his bare hands or beat up dozens of opponents. He is virile also because the sophisticated aristocratic Sakina offers herself to him in love. The character's uncontrolled outbreaks of "just wrath," exemplified through his hysterical scream, is a perfect template of identification for a young generation of under-privileged and aspiring youngsters, who are constantly motivated toward extra-legal violent acts by organizations such as the Bajrang Dal.

There is a chilling example of the effect that the movie had on at least some of the killers in Naroda Gaon, one of the many sites of terrible massacres in and around Ahmedabad itself. Echoing one of the early movie scenes at the train station where Tara reads, "Hindustanis learn killing from us" written in blood on the train, one of the attackers at Naroda Gaon wrote, "Muslims learn arson from us" with chalk on the metal door of a destroyed Muslim house.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.3 News reportage in the Times of India

The national newspaper Times of India differs from Sandesh in its reportage of the details and rumors that make up the Godhra incident. There is, for instance, no reference to the movie *Gadar* or Partition. And many more of its articles are credited to an author, with name attached, than in Sandesh, where most articles are simply attributed to staff. Hence, some measures of accountability are built into the Times coverage. But in the usage of sacrificial terms, and in giving voice to VHP members, it also participates in the perpetuation of a sacrificial logic.

In the Times of India on the February 28, 2002, the front page reads "58 die in ghastly attack on train. Mob targets Ram sevaks (temple construction volunteers) returning from Ayodhya, riots in Godhra." The article by Sajid Shaikh (a Muslim name) besides condemning and describing the Godhra incident alludes to the fact that there are different versions of what precisely happened, one claiming that the attack

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<sup>105</sup> Compare Rakesh Sharma's excellent documentary "Final Solution," 2002.

was completely unprovoked and one claiming the attack was provoked by a rumor that VHP activists had attacked a mosque in Signal Falia. The word “Hindu” is avoided in the text and substituted with “Ram sevak” and “VHP activists.” There is no reference to abducted women or to the movie *Gadar*.

Next to the above report, the article “Violence spreads like wildfire in state” describes the effects of the Godhra tragedy in cities and districts throughout Gujarat. No attempt is made to generalize the violence beyond its local incidence, as there is no reference to effects “outside” the state of Gujarat, unlike the reporting in *Sandesh*. If it had wanted, the *Times of India*, one of the largest all-India newspaper with reporters in all states, could easily have found other events to build on the story. There is an implicit warning that more trouble is expected as the VHP has called for a bandh the next day, and there is a description of the arbitrary revenge unleashed by heavily armed VHP activists at the train stations reached by the Sabarmati express after the tragedy. The report enumerates stabbings, beatings, attacks, and shooting by police to quell the issuing violence.

In “Was it pre-planned?” on the front page, the *Times* claims that the police have evidence for a conspiracy and that “ISI influence” is not ruled out, but no evidence is provided. While being criticized for having failed to anticipate violence of such magnitude, police sources draw attention to the challenge of such a big crowd gathered in such a short time, armed with petrol bombs and diesel cans, as well as to the deliberate attempt to spread rumors (the supposed burning of the mosque in Dahod), and to the fact that “slogan shouting” only led to violence in Godhra and not in the other places where VHP activists came through.<sup>106</sup> The reports also drew

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<sup>106</sup>This of course is not true. Violence had been recorded in several places including Faizabad, cf. *Jan Morcha* February 24, 2002. It is interesting to note the argument that the speed with which the mob suddenly appeared indicates “pre-meditation.” Curiously, the same conclusion of pre-meditation was not drawn for the Gujarat pogroms although many police reports precisely stated that crowds appeared quickly out of nowhere.

attention to the previous year's tension between Godhra Muslim "extremists" and "moderates" over the control of mosques.

In an article on page 3, titled "Arrest culprits in 24 hrs: VHP," the Godhra incident is described by the VHP as a "manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism." The organization has given the government a 24-hour ultimatum to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Godhra incident was meant to curb "Hindu awareness" and the "growing awareness on Hinduism." Within the same elaboration, VHP unit joint secretary Kaushik Mehta also alludes to the "blatant slaughter of cows in Bharuch" despite a ban, referring to an incident just a few days earlier.<sup>107</sup> Mehta also told TNN that, "*Ram mandir to ban kar rahega, chahe balidanon ki parampara shuru karni pade*," a sentence that remains un-translated in the Times of India, an omission perhaps due to the statement's incendiary content. "We will keep on building the Ram mandir (Ram temple) but the tradition of sacrifice will have to be started." The VHP calls a *bandh* and all Hindus are told to remain indoors on Thursday "as a mark of respect to the departed souls."

On the lower half of page 3, a report called, "Survivors see with rage, mourn the dead," describes attacks on female *kar sevaks* traveling on the Sabarmati Express. It cites sixty-five year old Devika Luhana, "[T]hey will all go to hell for this act of malice." Sushma Shukla tells TNN "[I]n our culture, women are respected and not attacked with swords and acid. We should not take this lying down," while women *kar sevaks* in the background shout, "*koi qurbani khali na jaaye*" ("No sacrifice should go in vain"). Heta Patel, a member of Durga Vahini, the women's wing of the Bajrang Dal, narrates, "They stormed inside the women's bogie, and before we could react they set the entire bogie on fire. Some of us managed to escape, but a number of our sisters got trapped...it was horrifying."

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<sup>107</sup>I discuss this incident in Tankaria village more closely in chapter nine.

The ambiguity of VHP member Heta Patel's statement seems purposeful. It could imply a reference to the abduction of women, but in any case, it directly invokes the image of violence to women. Sandesh also mentions that attackers entered the train, but no larger tale emerges from this fact. It is unclear if the women are "trapped" by the fire (and burnt), or "trapped" by the attackers (*sapdai gai*, "ensnared" as in Sandesh) and carried away for sexual pleasures as in the version of Sandesh. The Times of India showed some restraint here and does not spin the story further.

The term for sacrifice used is *kurbani* (written *qurbani*) indicating its "Muslim" origin. As a noun it means "sacrifice," as an adjective "overjoyed," and it is closely associated with the Muslim Bakri-Id festival in which bulls are traditionally slaughtered as a symbolical substitute for Abraham's son. Usually, the VHP does not use these terms but instead the "Vedic" terms "*yagna*" and "*balidan*" for sacrifice and sacrificial offering, respectively.<sup>108</sup>

On page 3, in "Emotions run high at Kalupur railway station," Maheshbhai from Dholka narrates how his missing son ventured on the pilgrimage to Ayodhya. "[M]y son came up to me and sprung a surprise by touching my feet. He asked permission to go to Ayodhya for kar seva, and I gave in to his wishes because he was going for a just cause (...) This heinous act will not go unpunished," he screamed. Rajesh Darji looks for his 65 year-old mother Taraben who does not show up in the list of injured and has not yet arrived, "[G]odhra will burn after this dastardly act."

On March 1, in an article titled, "Shapeless bundles wrapped in linen," Sourav Mukherjee and Sanjay Pandey describe the arrival at Ahmedabad Sola Civic Hospital of the Godhra victims's bodies the previous day. It also describes the remains of the bodies, "Limbs struck out in grotesque angles. Bodies, wrapped in cloth, were

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<sup>108</sup>The term *kurbani* seems to have been omitted in several of the newer Gujarati dictionaries (GUCD). In the Modern Standard Gujarati-English Dictionary, however, it is listed as 'sacrifice,' also meaning 'overjoyed' in its adjectival form. In *Jodnikosh* (1949) it is listed simply as a synonym for *balidan*, 'sacrifice,' or 'sacrificial offering.'

statically frozen in horrifying postures. Looking impossibly small, the bundles of mortal remains were dripped in blood and gore” (sic). At the hospital a VHP man is quoted, “For the nine from Amraiwadi who laid their lives for the country, there will be 90 more to replace. We had gone there for ‘yagna’ (sacrifice) only, yet the *kafirs* (read Muslims) butchered the devotees. This time we will go and construct the Ram temple. “ Jyotsnaben Rawal of Amraiwadi, who lost her daughter Nilima, is cited, “We won’t let this end here. My daughter Nilima had gone to attend the ‘Ram Naam Yagna’ at Ayodhya, not to do any damage. And yet she was brutally killed. Let it be noted that they have drawn the first blood, whatever follows is going to be retaliatory. The *kafirs* need to be driven out of this country so that we can live in peace.”<sup>109</sup>

In a nominal inversion, VHP activists use the Arab term “*kafir*” to refer to Muslims. Since *kafir* means “non-believer,” this charge makes no sense, especially coming from a Hindu. I personally never heard a Muslim using the term *kafir* for a Hindu, but in Gujarat, Hindus have often complained to me that Muslims consider them *kafir*. Members of the VHP, especially, never tire of pointing out that Muslims openly call Hindus “*kafir*” during Friday prayers in the mosque. This accusation is said to exemplify the particularly vicious fanaticism and intolerance of Muslims generally.<sup>110</sup> For a Hindu, all religions are equally true, and there can never be a “non-believer,” as “Hinduism” is not a religion but “a way of life.” Many *sampradaya* (sects) with very different ways of life consider themselves “Hindu.” What, then, are these VHP members saying here when they use the word “*kafir*?” Most likely, the VHP members who use *kafir* for Muslims are engaged in an inverse mimetic ploy: they call Muslims that which they claim to be called by them.

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<sup>109</sup>Times of India, March 1, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup>This is one of the typical claims that are difficult to disprove satisfactorily to someone who is convinced of them. Once they enter circulation, and given the numbers of mosques in Gujarat and the abundance of “Fridays,” they never die. I have never experienced a Friday prayer where the Maulvi called the Hindu neighbors *kafir*, nor have I met a Muslim who admitted this much to me.

On March 3 in an article called, “Godhra victims counsel restraint, some seek revenge,” Sourav Mukherjee and Radha Sharma write, “They are like the Phoenix [sic]. Emerging from the ashes of the communal flare-up, some of the Godhra carnage survivors seem purified like gold.”<sup>111</sup> But there are also those who continue to burn with the desire to avenge their wounds. ‘I’m extremely disturbed over what is happening in our area. I had pleaded with folded hands to all who came to my son’s cremation to please restrain themselves and maintain peace,’ says Govind Makwana.” Govind has lost his son Umakant in the Godhra carnage. The authors continue, “But the Naroda-Patia area of Ahmedabad is still tense after a 5,000-strong mob burnt no less than 65 people alive avenging the Godhra killings in one stroke. The mob in the area was especially enraged over the death of Umakant and it is said that what happened in Naroda-Patia was ‘their tribute’ to him.” The article continues citing survivors and relatives “baying for the rival community’s blood,” who vow “We will drive them out of the country.” One victim announces that “[t]he enemies will die a horrible death.” Another, Jayanthibhai Patel, states “[t]hat over 300 [Muslims] have died since Godhra is small solace. Our revenge will be complete only after we establish a Hindu rashtra [Hindu nation] here.”<sup>112</sup>

The attack by ghosts in Sandesh is reported by the Times of India as a “ghastly” incident. There is no reference to Partition and no attempt to implicate all of India in the violence. This omission is all the more telling in that the *Times* is a newspaper with national reach but nonetheless does not claim a national effect for the Godhra incident. By contrast, Sandesh, a local vernacular paper, insistently claims national significance for local violence and a “red alert” on all borders. The Times also questions whether the Godhra incident was provoked, though it does not elaborate the point. And it suggests that there are divisions within the Muslim communities of

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<sup>111</sup>They seem purified like gold because...of the victims.

<sup>112</sup>Times of India, March 3, 2002, p.3.

Godhra. It also clearly reports the behavior of armed VHP activists after the Godhra incident, and the arbitrary targeting of innocent members of the Muslim minority community in railways stations from Godhra to Ahmedabad, as well as the complicit role of the police in subsequent days.

Much like Sandesh, the *Times* interviews VHP members and victims of the initial train incident, but no Muslim resident or eye-witness of Godhra is asked to give a statement. It differs from Sandesh in reporting the chaos at the station and the hospital where *karsevaks* gathered, not using this chaos as a cover to spin unsubstantiated rumors and tales. The Times does report on rumors but without elaborating them and serving them even more suggestively.

Finally, there is a revealing substitution that occurs when it comes to reporting abduction. The same story is reported in the Times, with changes in names and theme. In Sandesh, the VHP functionary Kaushik Patel alluded to missing women, but in the Times of India, the VHP official Kaushik Mehta also alludes to something missing. For the *Times*, it is not missing women but missing cows, supposedly sacrificed during the Islamic Id festival in village of Tankaria a few days earlier. The accusation of abduction of women in Sandesh becomes the complaint about the slaughter of cows in the *Times*. It is not clear to me if these two VHP members who share a first name “Kaushik” (one an “in-charge VHP” and the other “VHP joint general secretary Gujarat unit”) are not one and the same. The surname ‘Mehta’ can also be found among many members of the Patel caste. Whatever the case, the story is the same. And the fact that the tale of the abducted women does not emerge in the Times of India relates paradigmatically to the abducted cows in a curious substitution. For the *Times*, cow slaughter and the call to *qurbani* (sacrifice) where bulls are slaughtered serves as a subtext. The Times substitutes slaughtered cows for Sandesh’s invisible women. Cows are sacrificed and/or women are raped. There is an observable



supplementary logic between the English-language and Gujarati-language print media: the Gujarati-language press prints what is omitted or cannot be said in the English-language press, but what is nonetheless internal to it.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Although at times during curfew in certain areas of the city vegetables and milk were hard to get, the news—circulating image, word, and rumor--never failed to find its reader. The institution of the pan shop and, to a lesser extent, the tea shop were also integral in distributing and circulating the news. I often wondered what people would chat about if there were no such thing as vernacular papers.<sup>113</sup>

This chapter demonstrates that in the news coverage of February 28, 2002, and the following days, a paradigmatic structure emerged in which the depth of a story is constructed not through certainty of facts or evidence but allusion and accumulated suggestion. One article lends depth to another; the same story is told in different versions, even in the very same newspaper; and the weight of accountability is displaced away from facts to somewhere else, for example the experience of fright evoked by watching scenes of the feature movie *Gadar* on Partition. One person's suggestion is supplemented by another person's opinion that in turn is supplemented by another person's insinuation --resulting in a tale told repeatedly but never fully told.

Emerging beneath the odd deployment of invisible women, a popular feature film (*Gadar*), images of roasted bodies, and a verbal repertoire pregnant with sacrificial terms, is the evocation of something forbidden and taboo yet scripted. The timing here is important, for this script is deployed immediately before and during a

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<sup>113</sup>Ethnographic work among villagers in the mid 1990's in northern Gujarat convinces me that the news has not only these patterns of circulation in cities, like Ahmedabad. Villagers also circulate very evocative material, but the stories would likely be less calibrated towards larger political issues.

pogrom, meted out especially to one particular strata of society, a strata that in many ways has long been stigmatized.

The different versions of missing women are structural transformations of each other: “10-15 girls” abducted by mob on page one, become girls “hijacked” by men with swords on page two, then “sacrificial offering to beasts” and “8-10 women snatched away by devils” on page sixteen, or “dead bodies of two girls with breasts cut off in Kalol” elsewhere in another edition of the same newspaper. The version becomes “3-4 kidnapped girls” in Gujarat Samachar, “our sisters got trapped” in the Times of India, and Adivasi women raped in a mosque in some of the local versions on the street. Ultimately, the transformative possibilities even allow for the substitution of “cows” for “women” in the Times of India, when it mentions the VHP’s lament of “blatant slaughter of cows in Bharuch” in lieu of the accusation of abducted women. One forbidden object of affinity is replaced with another forbidden object of ingestion.

In the movie *Gadar*, the forbidden is the access to the other group’s women, whether from a higher social class, like aristocratic Sakina, or from the other religious community. The infamous Muslims identified by Signal Falia in the news as abducting and consuming young Hindu women for pleasure are replicated in the *Gadar* scenes depicting Muslim rape of Sikh and Hindu women during Partition, and again in depicting how the simple rural Jat Tara accesses the beautiful Sakina who offers herself freely to him.

The *Gadar* film also allows for another forbidden sentiment to emerge: identification with the hero’s wrath, represented in the movie by a dubbed hysterical scream. This identification allows for a release from inhibitions to act out violence. Sandesh newspaper’s explicit call for a *virnyaak* (“He-man”) like Tara Singh, along with the VHP’s promise of a swift and proper answer in the face of Islamic terrorism,

seem like calls to arms for the man on the street. Once the just wrath of the ordinary man is aroused, *Gadar* teaches its viewers, his revenge is as terrible as Tara's, who in one scene severs a (Muslim) head from a Pakistani police officer with a single sword stroke, screaming in accomplished satisfaction, after which all other Pakistanis flee.

During the pogroms I saw both Hindus and Muslims reading Sandesh at open teashops in the old city surrounded by curfew and police vans. When I asked a group of Muslims why they read a paper filled with distortions about them, I was told that not *all maahiti* (information) in Sandesh was wrong, and that journalists and writers (*patrakaaro*), too, are victims of rumors (*afvaao*), so I should not make the newspaper solely responsible. Given Sandesh's clear partisanship and tendency to turn all news items into editorials, I found this generous explanation unconvincing.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, it is clear that the content in Sandesh does appeal to Muslim readers also, even though it might be untrue or heavily biased. Especially in narratives about evocative experience, such as those that invoke secret sexual and violent fantasies, Muslims and Hindus alike appear to share a similar desire to read. A tale's fuel seems to be it's own evocativeness, and the story --never quite told in full-- becomes complete only in the act of reading.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Indeed, a rumor does not have to be believed in any rigid sense of the word in order to be effective as a rumor. The rumor just has to "stick" to one's memory and be communicated. It just has to be evocative enough to be circulated continuously. In this way it can initiate a series of associations, which allow collective fantasies to emerge. It resembles *Aberglaube* (superstition; literally a belief, which exist in the register of a constant "still..." or "however..."), precisely in that the less you have evidence, the more it might nonetheless be evocative. It is the constant *Anspruch* (address, challenge) by the "possibly possible" that becomes potent in *Aberglaube*. Rumor, in turn, derives its power from the fact that it accesses a level that everyone can participate in, even those who are skeptical of the rumor's content. Sandesh's news are akin to rumor in that they provide satisfaction for a desire to imagine tabooed and forbidden things even to those who are targeted by the paper. They are akin to *Aberglaube* in that they are evocative enough that you cannot let them go. In fact your very skepticism might lead you to share the rumor with someone else, just to see what that person has to say, and thus, the rumor fulfills its function against your will, that is, to be distributed further and to be communicated to others.

<sup>115</sup>In the "The Great Indian Rape Trick" Arundhati Roy makes the argument that the constant representation and depiction of rape--supposedly to "critique" the criminal act--can actually function as a form of unselfconscious pornography, an erotic scene to be fantasized about by men in secrecy. She uses the excessive rape scenes in "Bandit Queen," and the way the entire movie seems to be built around them. Director Shekhar Kapur legitimized the choice of portraying excessive rape in the life of

In this sense Sandesh's news is akin to rumor in that every reader can participate in the fantasy that is summoned up. The real fuel of the rumor is neither its referent in the real, nor the desire of the reader to "know" the news. Rather it is the collective participation in, and imagination of, the fantasy expressed by a "news" story. Rumor derives its power from the fact that it accesses a level in which everyone can participate, even those skeptical of the rumor's content. Sandesh not only provides material for rumor but is part of a rumoring agency itself.<sup>116</sup>

That is also the reason why the incredible accusations of abducted women just suddenly disappear, and the interest in them wanes accordingly. Once the content of the rumor is de-cathected, there remains no interest in what it is that aroused so much passion just weeks earlier and legitimized extremely violent reactions and verbal incitements. Similarly, the formulaic and repetitive nature of the implicit accusations seems to suggest a substitutable target, what is the "Muslim" today, was the member lower caste groups yesterday and will be a tribal tomorrow.

The rumor's real source is a collective libidinal economy that normally lies dormant. Once this libidinal energy is expended, the rumor simply disappears. The obsession with rumor soon becomes disinterest. It reappears when re-cathected in the next round of rumor and violence.<sup>117</sup>

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Phoolan Devi in the name of "truth" and authenticity to Phoolan Devi's biography. Roy, however, without doubting Kapur's commitment to "Truth," questions whose truth he actually depicts when identifying himself with the victim in imagining sodomy to understand how it feels to be raped repeatedly. I think it would be in Roy's spirit if the argument was extended to other movies in which rape scenes and violence generally seems to be celebrated in the name of its horror. It is often in lustfully portraying the horror of violence that the claim of being "critical" emerges. Similarly, I would suggest that certain forms of representation and depiction of violence reveal a form of mis- or unrecognized participation in the act. I would argue the way *Gadar* is employed here is also such a form of participation, a sort of pornography of communal slaughter, a fascination with imagining what happened in 1947 and conveniently legitimizing a simultaneous lustful externalization of the very same. cf. "The Great Indian Rape Trick," On: [http://website.lineon.net/~jon.simmons/roy/ar\\_onbq.htm](http://website.lineon.net/~jon.simmons/roy/ar_onbq.htm), viewed 6 July 2004.

<sup>116</sup>In comparison to Sandesh the Times indeed cuts a good figure, but in relation to what one might expect from such a prominent daily, it is a sad disappointment.

<sup>117</sup>The Ahmedabad Police Commissioner (APC) Pandey implicitly acknowledged the libidinal quality of rumor when he complained in 2002 that during the violence, "educated people, 'repeatedly (...)

It is difficult to ascertain the original source of linguistic incitements, which were reiterated by the media and mirrored and supplemented on the streets in the first few days of the pogrom. In the use of a sacrificial terminology Sandesh surpassed even the VHP's usual heavy deployment of *yagna*, *balidan*, *qurbani* by adding *homaavavu*, *hutashan*, *holi*.<sup>118</sup> The consequence of this lustful expenditure in language is that people were not only "burnt alive" (*jivta salgaavaayaa*) but also "roasted" (*bhu-jaai maryaa hataa*), not only killed but also "ensnared" (*sapdai gai*) by "devils" (*shaytano*) and "sacrificed as food offerings" (*bhog bani*) to "beasts" (*hevaaniyato*) in a communally sensitive town like Godhra, referred to as a "communal center of sacrificial fires" (*komi hutashanio nu kendra*).<sup>119</sup>

The Times of India, too, invokes a sacrificial logic by giving voice to VHP activists and Godhra victims who claim Muslims are burning as "tribute" to avenge the death of a "Hindu" son at Naroda Patia, and that even 300 Muslim deaths will not properly avenge the Godhra killings, referring to the numbers published that day of "riot victims" so far. The VHP calls for a series of sacrifices (*balidanon ki parampara*), and its female members shout that no "*qurbani*" (sacrifice) shall be performed in vain.<sup>120</sup>

Explicit reference to sacrifice accompanies the many pictures of wounded women with bandages and bloodstains starting from February 28, 2002. Sandesh, in particular, consistently reproduces the horrifying images of "roasted" bodies lying on top of each other in a hospital.<sup>121</sup> From the 28 onward, it is unclear who is actually

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disobeying curfew restrictions and moving out of their houses just to participate in rumor-mongering." The expression "educated people" means to say "Hindu middle class." Cf. RW, p.19.

<sup>118</sup> Translation, sacrifice, blood offering, sacrifice, offering to fire, fire oblation, scapgoat, festival

<sup>119</sup> *Hutaashani* means the *holi*, the pile arranged of fire, *hutaashan* means martyr, *hut* means sacrificed, offered as a sacrifice, an oblation.

<sup>120</sup> *Parampara* means a regular sequence, a series, a tradition.

<sup>121</sup> For examples of disturbing pictures of charred bodies cf. Sandesh February 28, 2002 p.7; March 2, front page and p.5; March 3, p.1, p.5.

depicted. Are these Godhra victims still, Muslim victims of revenge, or Hindus killed in “riots” in the post-Godhra violence?

DVDs and Video-cassettes circulated secretly in Ahmedabad with horrifying depictions of masses of charred bodies. One such DVD I had to view in full to my great horror. It depicted an endless series of charred corpses of victims of Naroda Patia being carried by aid workers with *topis* (Muslim skullcaps) at night from one compound to another. Charred body after charred body; the little white tags on their feet kept falling off as the flesh was dissipating. The images were reminiscent of the publicly circulating images of the Godhra carnage from just a day earlier. This “documentation” is 75 minutes long, completely silent, and the pictures simply unbearable. Once the video played it became impossible to shut it off or to leave as if the viewers owed to the victims this last “viewing.” It was shown to me by a well-to-do middle class Muslim family in Navrangpura, who were watching the video in unison (children, wives, neighbors). It seemed to me as if they still could not believe this had actually happened to them, as if they were still in the process of assuring themselves of something. I also encountered a video screening in Juhapura but was able to resist a second viewing of such material. The video was handled with great secrecy by many Muslims in Ahmedabad. I told an intellectual friend about the video, coincidentally a Hindu by birth and usually of a rather sober nature. He shocked me by voicing the suspicion that the bodies depicted in this video might actually be “secretly killed Hindu victims” used by conspiring Muslims to create “false evidence.”

It never becomes clear to me why this material should be “secret,” when similar pictures were shown openly by Sandesh simultaneously. It almost seemed as if these pictures offer a horror of violence, which then can be owned by opposing groups simultaneously, because neither media depictions nor privately circulated

Video materials contained specific reference to the identity of the victims. In the end, the organized confusion served well to hide the fact that most victims were Muslim, killed in a pogrom.

On March 2, a ghastly colored picture of several charred corpses flaunts the front page of Sandesh where all images now become spectacles. It depicts a part of the corpse of a woman and several parts of charred corpses of children around her fused by fire into each other, as if welded together, with the title, “Without stop 200 were sacrificed in violence”<sup>122</sup> (see APPENDIX A). The title employs the verb *homaavu*, “to be sacrificed, to be plunged, to be engaged for a work.”<sup>123</sup> At the bottom of the page the word *holi* is used to reference fire.<sup>124</sup>

At work in the use of words there is a formidable contagion of sacrificial logic: to be burnt alive (*jivtaa jalaavi devaani*) becomes, on the following day, to be offered as a sacrifice into fire (*homaya*) or, on the next day, into the fire of violence (*hinsa ni holi*), *holi* also being the name of the popular festival. The *holi* is a bonfire of that which is held in public contempt; idiomatically it also means “scapegoat.” Women are not only killed but also offered as *bhog*, a term that simultaneously references suffering as well as enjoyment, meaning “victim” or “an object of enjoyment” as well as “a suffering.”<sup>125</sup> On the streets these women become imagined as consumed for pleasure (“*enjoy mate*”), and all killing becomes a form of devouring, a spectacle for imagining lustful ingestion.

<sup>122</sup>The front page reads in Gujarati: “*vanthambi hinsamaa 200 homaya.*”

<sup>123</sup>TMGD. The term *hom* means a burnt offering, an oblation, a sacrifice, and describes “the casting (of clarified butter, rice, etc.) into fire as an offering to the gods accompanied by prayer or invocations” (cf. TMGD). The verb *homvu* means ‘to sacrifice’ and ‘to engage to do a work.’

<sup>124</sup>The term *holi* is used of course for the festival Holi as well as for the ceremonial bonfire lit at the end of the festival. The term relates to “a bonfire of a heap of any article of public contempt,” and “severe anxiety, mental torment, restlessness,” or “a cow dung cake to be thrown into the bonfire” (cf. GUCD). Idiomatically, the term *holi* also means ‘scapegoat,’ or ‘a cat’s paw’ as in *holinu naariyel* (cf. TMGD), *naariyel* being the coconut substituting for the animal victim in sacrifice. Like the German *Opfer*, the word *holi* means sacrifice as well as a sacrificial victim.

<sup>125</sup>See footnote 28 of this chapter for a complete explanation of the term.

Again one cannot resist but note a great expenditure in language, a celebration of words and images invoking usually forbidden associations like causing pain and suffering in worship (sacrificing living beings to the Gods as in traditional animal sacrifice), dismembering bodies (butchering), slaughtering cows (beef consumption), consuming women (rape), as well as indirect associations to cannibalism (“roasted bodies”).<sup>126</sup> The sacrificial terminology makes it possible to evoke this forbidden imagery. It is the reader who will make the picture cohesive by participating in image, word, and moving picture in her and his own way.

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<sup>126</sup>The linguistic invocation of “meat” is not a singular instance. A Muslim eyewitness and survivor of the Naroda Patia massacre told *Communalism Combat* in Hindi, “*Hamare log jal kaar kabaab ban gaye. Chat se sab kaam hua.* (Our people were reduced to *kabaab* [grilled meat] in seconds. It was all over in a flash.)”, cf. GG p. 21.



## Chapter 4.0 Farmers into the city

After I returned to Gujarat in 2001, I invited Bharat to live with me. During to the Gujarat earthquake in January 2001, the student hostel in which he stayed had become a serious security hazard. We had initially met in 1999, during language study, and we already had twice shared an apartment in Ahmedabad. Many of Bharat's comrades (*bhaibandh*) and student colleagues are regional caste affiliates with whom he shares *bhaichaaro* (fraternal relations), which includes certain unspoken obligations. For instance, if brethren arrive in the city, they would stay with him--and consequently me--for several days. Through these visits, I met many of Bharat's caste affiliates. One of them, Pratab, arrived from a village close to Bharat's once while I was away on a trip. Given the fact that our spacious apartment had more room we'd ever need, and that I was interested in his studies of Mahatma Gandhi at Gujarat Vidhyapit, I agreed with Bharat to invite Pratab to stay with us. Both Pratab and Bharat come from adjacent villages in Mahesana. Both come from the same caste and cultural background, both are the first in their respective families to enter a university, and both felt a little out of place in urban middle-class Naranpura.

### 4.1 Some Reflections from the first days of Violence

When I talk to Bharat in the evening of the 28, 2002, he still refers to the Godhra incident as "*akasmaat thayo chee*," an *akasmaat* (accident, disaster) in which, he says, 57 people died. Bharat generally does not like to talk about things like communalism, Muslims, or politics. When we met in 1999 he complained to his professor who arranged for us to live together that I asked too many questions about things he does not find easy to explain. Now, when we are together with his friends,

mostly from the Jadav caste to which he has specific obligations and loyalty, he often likes to delegate my questions to more eloquent speakers within the group.<sup>1</sup>

But this particular evening Bharat is eager to make me understand, and I do not have to resort to any of my usual annoying insistence. He tells me that the “*atankvadio*” (terrorists) of Godhra were not from *bahaar* (outside), but rather, that the ISI (Pakistani Intelligence Service) gave money to locals in order to “manufacture riots” (“*tofaan karaave chhe*”, using the causative of *karvu*, to do). Actually, Bharat explains, there are very few individuals from “there” (Pakistan) in India, be it in Godhra or elsewhere. The work that was done in Godhra was planned well beforehand (“*pahelathi nakki karelo akasmaat*,” lit. a formerly planned accident) and executed by locals who had hijacked (“*haijak karvi*”) the Sabarmati Express.

Bharat calls this event a “*chalenj*.” He says Muslims took up the “challenge” (“*chalenj le chhe*”) and that was their mistake. He does not mean to say that “Muslims challenged Hindus,” which is a conventional understanding in Ahmedabad, a city of regular communal clashes. For Bharat, Muslims and Hindus are natural competitors and always involved in some form of challenge to one another. What he means to say here by employing the word *chalenj* is that Pakistanis instigated Indian Muslims to act. Pakistan dared Indian Muslims to do what they now have accomplished in Godhra. The *chalenj* probably entailed complicity between the Pakistani Intelligence Services and local Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Jadav are Karadia of the *nadoda rajput* branch, classified as a *pachhaat varg* (a backward class), part of the OBC, other backward classes (cf. Parikh 1998:75). Most established Rajput groups question their claim to *rajput* status as *kshatriya* (Tambs-Lyche 1992:21). According to Shah (1975:10) they have only relatively recently formed an endogamous group; they used to exchange women with Rajput groups in Rasjathan (formerly known as Rajputana and thus homeland of Rajputs). If we can assume that the exchange was asymmetrical (hypergamy) as Northern Rajput are in general considered more noble, this would explain the volatility of their status.

<sup>2</sup>I asked Bharat for the Gujarati term for “*chalenj*.” He tells me “*baaidhari*,” a guarantee. He says, “‘*Ame karishu,*’ *evi emne baaidhari aape chhe*, which translates into, “‘We will do it,’ thus they are offering a guarantee to them.” In other words, the Muslims gave a promise to the Pakistanis (offering a guarantee) to do what they have done in Godhra. Note the tendency when speaking Gujarati to ventriloquize the speaker when he is the object of description in a sentence, without the use of any

It is in this sort of division of labor that Pakistan is imagined to inhabit acts and thoughts of local Muslims. Whatever happens between Hindus and Muslims in India, Bharat has it, is *always* connected to Pakistan. At times the connection occurs in the form of concrete political plots (as in Godhra), but more often through some form of identification of local Muslims with their powerful brethren across the border. Pakistani Muslims are watching India and pose a constant *chalenj*. In other words, when Bharat talks about instigation, provocation, or *chalenj*, he not only talks in the register of underworld politics or secret service activities, but also in a more quotidian register of cricket matches and audience. Indian Muslims are constantly receiving this *chalenj* from across the border to show their worth, piety, and devotion. Pakistan dared Indian Muslims to attack Hindus in Godhra and the Muslims of Godhra finally took up the *chalenj*.

It is of prime importance, therefore, Bharat continues, that Muslims are punished so that they will not take up this *chalenj* a second time, that they should not become the proxies of Pakistan in India. He asks me pointedly about the Muslims, “*chalenj shaa maate levi joie, maarvani?*” (“Why is it necessary to take up such a challenge for killing?”). In response the RSS now merely takes revenge against the Muslims (“*RSS Muslim ne baadlo le chhe*”).<sup>3</sup> For Bharat, the RSS is the instrument of a certain form of justice, a justice that could not have been meted out from the state because, he says, of “corrupt laws” and minority-appeasing politicians. The

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delineated indirect speech (I amended this by adding -‘...’-). Bharat plays the Muslim in order to describe him, when he says, “We will do it” (*ame karishu*), because he uses the pronoun “*ame*,” which is always exclusive of the listener addressed in a dialogue. *Ame* means a “we,” which excludes the listener. If the listener is included in the “we,” it should be *aapNe* (we, inclusive), not *ame*. In Gujarati this distinction is important as it allows one to easily refer to the “we” of one’s own group, caste or community, without confusion. It is used in order to say “me and my people” versus “you and your people.” In other words, the Muslim that Bharat ventriloquizes for the brief instant of a sentence addresses only Muslim listeners.

<sup>3</sup>Bharat often says RSS even if he means the VHP or the Bajrang Dal. He is convinced they are all the same.

punishment is necessary both to control Muslims (*kontrol raakhva mate*) and for what he calls, in English, “*purification*.”

Bharat singles out as “corrupt” those laws that are supposed to protect Muslims. They are corrupt because in protecting they also favor Muslims. He asks, why should Muslims receive preferential treatment over others? Why should only Muslims be called “a minority” and not all other caste groups as well? Is not every Hindu a member of a caste, a minority in relation to other caste groups? And why are Hindus not a minority vis-a-vis Christians and Muslims, groups that are not only numerically superior to Hindus but also have invaded and dominated them?

If the police were able to kill all the accused Muslims arrested in Godhra, speculates Bharat, then no action would have to be taken. But the law is such that no one can just simply be beaten or killed, even if they justly deserve that punishment. In Bharat’s view, law protects “*goondas*” (criminals). He adds, with no touch of cynicism, “*democratics chhe*” (that’s democracy). Different, more indirect measures have to be taken to prevent such an attack in the future. What Bharat expresses here in his own way is a genuinely psychological argument about collective punishment.

When Hindu-Muslim riots break out, Bharat continues, neighbors attack each other and, as a Hindu, he says, we “burn, cut, destroy, raze.” When Bharat concludes, “I am a Hindu, thus I strike at Muslims,” he inhabits the logic that defines the generalized Hindu-Muslim *chalenj*. First a Hindu, then a neighbor. Those in the streets, he says, come mostly from “*lower public*.” Many are “BC” (backward classes and castes). I ask him which precise groups are involved. Without giving the question much thought, he tells me, there are Thakor, Thakkar, Harijan, Vagri, even Patel, and also Rajput like himself. Today, they are all *sevako* (devotees, servants) who go

around together to kill Muslims and destroy their property (“*saathe nikle chhe, muslimne maare chhe, ane je milkaat chhe emne nukshaan kare chhe*”).<sup>4</sup>

The rationale behind making one community at large pay for what *trasvaadio* (terrorists) have done, he explains, is that every community’s cohesion rests on its own self-policing in the absence of other relevant authority. Thus, whomever and whatever you hit and kill does not matter. The “*punishment*”—his use of the English endows the concept with more authority--will automatically have effects on the Muslim community. First, it will lessen their numbers, and, second, it will teach them respect and fear. The disciplining will somehow arrest the idea that they can do what they have done in Kashmir. I object that small, innocent Muslim artisans or shopkeepers will get hurt. Bharat counters that even if this happens it will have a positive effect: in the future, Muslims will not dare to pick up the “*chalenj*” since they will have experienced such a large “*nukshaan*” (loss). They will be made responsible internally, that is, within that single entity that he considers to be the “Muslim community.”

There will be a “cut” (*kat*)<sup>5</sup> in the relation (*sambandh*) between these terrorists and local Muslims, he explains, as well as between what he calls “big” local Muslims

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<sup>4</sup>Bharat insists, “*E badaj sevako chhe. Real ma, sevako chhe j.*” His insistence is not happenstance. The term *sevako* (servants) is significant because *sevak* indicates “follower, worshipper, votary, and devotee” (cf. TMGED). The root *seva* (service) indicates an act without need for compensation and is distinguished sharply from a paid servant or employee (a mere *naukar* doing *naukari*, lowly work). This distinction between selfless service (*seva*) and lowly work (*naukari*) is not merely lexical, but inherent in the daily usage of the term throughout Gujarat. A *pujari* (priest) at a temple is not understood to provide *naukari* but *seva*, even if he *de facto* receives a payment for his work. Hence to call a *sevak* merely a *naukar* can under certain circumstances be little short of abuse. Equivalently, a *bhakt* (devotee) of a Guru or a God is not understood to be a *naukar* but a *sevak*, one who works out of love, affection, and devotion. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)--usually translated as “Association of National Volunteers” (Jaffrelot 1996:33)--has an entire bundle of organizations under its mighty wings and makes use of the word in many ways. For example, pilgrims who travel to Ayodhya organized by the VHP are referred to as *ramsevako*, devotees of Ram, and the *Sangh Parivar*’s service wing is called *Seva Vibhag*. It has a coordination body called ‘Sewa International’ etc. (cf. FEH 2002:5-6).

<sup>5</sup>Initially I thought the term *kat* is derived from the English “cut” which might well be Bharat’s intent. But Mehta & Mehta in the TMGED define *kat* as derived from Arabic meaning “the point of a pen” as well as a “cut.” When Bharat uses this term, he accompanies it with a typical hand gesture suggesting the termination of a relationship to an entire set of people. For example, when he breaks an arranged marriage promise with his wife-to-be, he uses the word *kat*, because it also implies also the termination of social relations to one’s affines.

and “small” local Muslims. If there would be no punishment, they might do it again. They need to punish to control Muslims (“*kontrol leva maate*” [in order to take control] who otherwise “will become more and more a troublemaker” (“*Muslim loko divase divase traasvadi vati jashe*”). Bharat concludes, “*A solushan saro solushan nathi, matr sampradayik* [customary, traditional, sectarian] *chhe, dharm chhe.*” (This solution is not particularly nice, but it is customary (*sampradayik*) and dutiful (*dharmik*, religious).

Dumbfounded by his straightforward answer and rationalization of violence, I try to claim that this so-called “punishment” might now initiate a cycle of violence. But Bharat remains relaxed and self-secure. He tells does not think there will be any Muslim retaliation (*badlo*), because the Hindus are in a majority (*bahumati*). It is not in the interests of the *laghumati* (minority) to initiate a cycle of violence in which they can only lose. Bharat explains, the Muslim whose shop was burnt does not know which Hindu is responsible. He does not know if his neighbor was responsible or some other Hindu from afar. To whom does he bring his revenge? Muslims, he continues, would actually have to be in the majority take revenge: “*Etle a tak joie chhe ke majority mohamedyan ni chhe.*”

Majority, for Bharat, makes possible “*tak*” (opportunity). The *tak* to take revenge is assured by the fact that Muslims are in the unfortunate condition of minority. He has no doubt that if the numbers were reversed, Hindus would be burnt and beaten. “*Evu bane chhe*” (both are like this), he says. The purifying logic of what Bharat calls “*punishment*” proceeds mechanically. It is meted out from a majority community against a minority community. There is something inevitable about it.

Bharat’s statement about *tak* and the inevitability of violence seems to contradict his initial thoughts about why Muslims were motivated to side with the Pakistan’s ISI in the first place: to arrange for the Godhra incident. Then, there is a

certain element of premonition in his explanation. It is surely correct that in the months following the first few days of the pogrom, the collective Gujarati Muslim community did not attempt to take revenge, although the rumor that they would remained important, especially among well-to-do middle class Gujaratis. Bharat's assessment thus stood in stark contrast to a growing fear that Muslims would retaliate massively in neighborhoods all over central Gujarat. Such fears often bordered on hysteria. But Bharat's premonition was correct in assuming that Muslims would not collectively retaliate.

Bharat surprises me by revealing that the RSS is giving the orders now. The organization does what "Law" (he always says "*louw*" pronounced like love) cannot. But when I ask about their militancy, he instead tells me that the RSS, VHP, and BD are organizations knowledgeable about "culture" ("*sanskritini jaaNe chhe*"). The RSS advocates Swadeshi ("*svadeshi ni himaayat kare chhe*") so that Indian goods are bought. The VHP and BD offer protection to *sanskriti* --a term connoting civilization, culture, as well as progress. For example, he says that if there is any *maryaadaa* (limitation, boundary, modesty), then the memory of it should be kept ("*je maryaadaa che ene jaanvi raakhvu*"). If there are any customs ("*ritrivaajo s aachvi raakhvaa*"), then they too be should protected. He asserts that "culture" consist of *raheNikarNi* (the way of doing things) and *khaaNipiNi* (eating and drinking).<sup>6</sup>

Bharat talks about *sanskriti* as if it is something that can easily be lost, or forgotten, like something learned by rote in school. *Sanskriti* needs to be affirmed, if not "*pachhi maryaadaa nahi rahe*" (the boundaries of modesty will not remain). He cites as positive examples the struggle for the building of the temple in Ayodhya for

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<sup>6</sup>The term *raheNi* means "manner or style of living," "mode of life," as well as "conduct in respect of morality." The compound *raheNikarNi* is translated as "behaviors," "manners," "ways of doing things," and "manner of living and acting in life." The term *khaaNipiNi*, "eating-drinking," is self-explanatory (cf. GED, TMGED).

*Ramchandrabhagwan*, or, the agitation of Bal Thackeray against the celebration of Valentine's Day.<sup>7</sup>

Every year in early February, the Shiv Sena (SS) supremo of Bombay holds court with the media and from behind his dark sunglasses warns them about the threat to Indian modesty caused by the unofficial "festival of love" in which gifts --usually flowers but sometimes even terrifying teddy bears-- are passed from boy to girl and girl to boy in yellow, white, and red.<sup>8</sup> Such gifts, he says, might just symbolize "friendship," "peace," and (god forbid) "romantic love." Even more alarming is that these gifts are also exchanged outside of custom or marriage between same sex pairs, female or male. The festival is popular with students and is always discussed as emblematic of "Western values" (although it is actually only American) in Gujarat. In 2001, I witnessed how shop owners in Ahmedabad were lambasted by Bajrang Dal activists for selling colorful kitschy Valentine cards that depicted a circle of red hearts framed with licentious sentences such as "For my dearest best friend..."

Bharat explains to me that on this day, girls and boys meet in hotels in order to make love ("*prem kare chhe*") and that they are "believing in sex" ("*seksh maane chhe*" [sic!]). According to *sanskriti* ("*sanskriti ni andar*"), the engagement in premarital sex is wrong, however. All sexual contact should be left for after marriage. If these issues are not addressed, he is convinced that within a decade *sanskriti* would fall into ruin ("*sanskriti ni nash tashe*"). That is why it is first and foremost to be preserved ("*jaaLvavi joie*").

I ask, what would happen if *maryaadaa* (limitation, modesty, boundary) were lost? Bharat explains that many problems (*prashno*, questions) would arise. Men would go here and there and not want a "*misses*" (read *patni*, a wife) anymore. He

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<sup>7</sup>Bharat uses the verb *ujvu* for celebrate, a term meaning "to hand over, to dedicate, to install fire in a fire temple." The word is used when milk or water is poured over the deity while mantras are sung. It also means "to lubricate" (cf. GED).

<sup>8</sup>*Times of India* February 15, 2002, p. 3.



stresses, “*diverse le lechhe*,” meaning they will get a divorce. The boundaries between mother- and daughter-in-law would be shattered (“*saasu-vahu ni maryaadaa*”), as would the modesty between brother and sister (“*bhai-bahen ni maryaadaa*”). I ask Bharat why there was no need for such a protector of *sanskriti* in other countries like, say, America or Germany. Why does one need to protect customs? His candid retort, “There is no culture in America.” There is only “*item jovai chhe*” (literally, “items are seen”)—which I take to mean that America has no custom but only material objects. If Indian culture is not protected, then “*western culture avi jashe*” (Western culture will come). Bharat imagines Western culture as a void, a culture without civilization, a sort of *sanskriti* without *maryaadaa*.<sup>9</sup>

The absence of *maryaadaa* is what some young Gujaratis ambiguously call “free.” Young Gujarati men I meet over the years react with perplexity to my unfamiliar insistence that I am not married nor plan to marry, or that I stubbornly claim to belong to no religious group whatsoever. At times there is also a discernible allure in being called “free.” For example, a young man arrives at a teashop and joins a group of students that I have been meeting for a couple of weeks. He inquires routinely about my caste, religion, and marital status and by way of abbreviation is told, “*e to free chhe*” (“...but he is free”).<sup>10</sup> This is not necessarily meant as a compliment. Bharat, for instance, will use the same English “free” with the negative connotation of “everything goes.” For him, the West is “free” but also void, merely “item” without boundary. In the West there is no culture or civilization (*sanskriti*), and where there is no *maryaadaa* (no limitation) there also is no restraint.

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<sup>9</sup>I oscillate between culpability and irritation after he tells me this. I am the most important source of information about the West to which he has ever had access. His answer casts a long shadow over me, too.

<sup>10</sup>It is an abbreviation because all these aspects are interconnected and form the matrix by which one seeks to understand the other’s social positioning, the sense of self and other. I translate the “to” here as “but” as usually done.

Bharat's description of what is in danger of disappearing is astonishingly simple: "*Sanskriti* means *raheNikarNi* (the way of doing things), how one should live, where one should live, (...), what one should eat, what one should not eat, what one should study, what one should not study, that one should do *darshan* for the *mataji* (Goddess) and for *bhagwan* (God), and that all that, which is, that should be kept" ("*to e badu je chhe eno raakhvu joie*").<sup>11</sup> As we shall see later, Bharat mentions precisely those aspects of his own life since coming into the city, what he most struggles with and most carefully manipulates by adjusting and fine-tuning his behavior.

Bharat's insistence on the preservation of *maryaadaa* is equally political and personal, as it references his own trials with sexuality and restraint. As I will describe in more detail below, after coming into the city Bharat breaks off his marital arrangements with a local village woman, and has an affair with a university student colleague in his professor's (read Guru's) house, leading to a minor neighborhood scandal. Contrite, he agrees to desist from a "love marriage," and finally weds an entirely different woman, in a marriage arranged by his RSS uncle in conjuncture with his academic advisor (his irritated "Guru"). After these transgressions, Bharat returns to the fold and ultimately gets rewarded by receiving the "green light" for a position as "lecturer" at a city university--arranged through a telephone call by his RSS uncle. Bharat comes full circle, then. He knows exactly what the absence of restraint means and how authorities can enforce *maryaadaa*.

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<sup>11</sup>In Gujarati this reads, "*sanskriti etle raheNikarNi, aapNe kevirite rahevu joie, kya rahevu joie, (...), shu khaavu joie, shu naa khaavu joie, shu banvu joie, shu naa banvu joie, darshan karvu joie mataji bhagwane, to e badu je chhe eno rakhvu joie.*" I have translated the pronoun Bharat uses here (*aapNe*, "we") with "one" because in Gujarati there are two first person plural pronouns for *hu* ("I"), which are *ame* and *aapNe*. The former is exclusive of the listener, the second inclusive. By including the listener Bharat's statement becomes much more universalistic, adding an important twist to his normative claim. Had I only used the English "we," then the reader might have mistaken him to mean only "we, the Hindus" versus, say, the Muslims. But Bharat is not trying to argue like a cultural relativist. He is inclusive of others, because what he means with *sanskriti* --the right and the proper-- is absolute. Not "othering" in the sense of "making other," but rather *denying the claim of the other to difference* is indicated here.

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There are a couple of significant transformations in Bharat's account. Despite the fact that Bharat is acquainted with members of diverse Muslim communities in his home village, college, university and other contexts, the Muslim becomes a mere imaginary figure. The figure of the Muslim then metamorphoses from a powerful and threatening entity, the perpetrator of unspeakable crimes, incited and abetted by Pakistan's ISI, to an unfortunate but necessary victim-to-be-punished (in a mechanical act of purification), a member of a powerless minority unable to take revenge.

Note how in this transformation the object Muslim always only serves his need of expression underwriting the phantasmatic quality of the figure of the Muslim. At the same time, the account converts an accusation of local Muslims accepting the *chalenj* of Pakistan to the threat of cultural loss and the fear of the unbound-ness of desire. It is when mentioning a completely different sort of threat, the amorphous threat of *Entgrenzung* (the lack of restraint, a sort of derailment by desire), that Bharat feels the need to bring the protectors of culture back into play, organizations like the RSS, the VHP, and the BD. It is they who are in the "know" and it is they who can set the limits, who can bring back control ("*control leva mate*"). They not only bring back control by punishing Muslims, however, but they also guarantee *maryaadaa* (boundaries) through regulation of social relationships within the group (sexuality, modesty, marriage).

The amorphous nature of threats in Bharat's imaginary move from outside to inside, from enmity to intimateness, from the loathsome desires of others to one's own base wishes and the dangers of *Entgrenzung*. In the beginning the external threats of the enemy Pakistan (ISI) metamorphose into an internal threat: local Muslims taking up the *chalenj*. Lacking much potency because they are only a minority, however,

Muslims are quickly replaced by the perils of Western culture. The external threat of the West too, however, turns out to be only the instantiation of an internal danger. It is Hindus who abandon their culture and might desire to become negatively “*free*.” It is in Hindu men that danger lies. Therefore, it seems, the final step is the control of Hindus, in order to avoid the advent of a formidable void, the loss of *maryaadaa*.

The organizations listed by Bharat protect Indians from themselves, from the possibilities of their own desires, by fortifying *maryaadaa*. This parallels his own learning curve for he, too, was brought back into line by his academic advisor and RSS uncle. For Bharat, this process entails control of the orifices of the body through *raheNikarNi* (manner of living) and *khaaNipini* (eating and drinking). Indeed, as we shall see below all of the physical senses are involved: vision (seeing and being seen, especially through attire), touch and hearing (with whom he associates and lives), and most prominently taste (what and with whom he ingests food).

Without attending to the surface of body orifices, all forms of Hindu renunciation would be impossible, for at those orifices the external world meets the abode of the soul. Renunciation is an internalized sacrifice protecting the body orifice from intrusion of the external stimuli, the price for being in the world at all, by transforming desire for an object of the external world into disgust, that is, into the play of rejection and abjection. In this way disgust purifies one’s existence in the world, a compromise between the imperative for death in sacrifice while remaining alive (see chapter one). It is the sacrificial fire that purifies that which is about to be ingested. Bharat’s abstemiousness is the *maryaadaa* installed within, the sacrifice that creates the distance from the object of desire needed for the emergence of restraint. Restraint itself is an internal sacrifice, the sacrifice of one’s own desire (see chapter one on sacrifice), which restructures one’s own relation to the world. For Bharat it is his superiors, be they academic advisors, Brahmin teachers, or organizations like the

RSS, which bring back control through restraint enforced, for example, in the realm of taste through disgust and what I call the “malady of *allagi*,” as we shall see below.

The chilling transparency with which Bharat explains the socio-logic of collective punishment, a sort of dripping-down theory, is very common in the folk sociology of Ahmedabad. According to this logic, it is perfectly legitimate to punish the community collectively because only thus will the community police itself and reign in those elements in their midst that took up the *chalenj* of Pakistan. The collective punishment will lead to an automatic internal purification, where good and innocent Muslims will somehow pressure bad and guilty Muslims to stop heeding Pakistan’s challenges. In the days and weeks following the first day of the pogrom, a logic of purification permeated conversations in teashops and living rooms. Collective punishment was often understood as effective precisely because Muslims, being in the un-admirable position of minority, have an interest in halting a process that leads to their own victimization.

Bharat’s rationalization of violence assumes it is legitimate to punish innocent members of the other community for what they represent: a future threat of what they have not done but, given a reversal of fortunes, would socio-logically do. He admits, in his own way, that this is unfortunate, but he also redeems it as necessary. The logic of action he implicitly endorses allows for the substitution of the innocent for the guilty, an individual for the group, and a self-policing community for the state, unburdened of its accountability to protect each and every individual citizen.

Bharat’s position comes close to abdicating any ethical position. This abdication of the ethical goes some way toward explaining why, during the pogroms, he does not understand murder to be murder and killing begets a sacrificial color. In the contemporary Gujarati context this sacrifice is pre-ethical. Sacrifice is that force which emerges when all civilization is stripped away and ritual time is turned back to

when, in sacrifice, killing was no killing. Contemporary sacrifice is therefore the symbolic technology that allows for the abdication of the ethical.

On March 12 Bharat tells me rather matter-of-factly about attacks on the dormitories at Gujarat University hostel by student colleagues he identifies as “*RSS ane VHP sevako*.” The students entered into the rooms of Muslim colleagues and took matrices, books, blankets, certifications, and everything else it was convenient to take. They then either took the objects home or ceremoniously burnt them on the university campus. At the time, the Muslim students were not present. Since the violence began, they had not dared appear in that part of the city. Bharat characterizes the participants of these attacks, in which he claims he took no part, as displaying “*dharmik valaN*,” a mental inclination toward one’s duty, a religious inclination.

He understands the violent Hindu abreaction not as a lack of morality but, quite the contrary, as the expression of a religious sentiment. The attacks are pious and virtuous, *dharmik*. What Bharat under different circumstances would have referred to as the work of “*goondas*” and “anti-social elements” becomes *dharmik valan* during the months of violence. One might think that Bharat is an exception. However, his explanations differ from those of others in Ahmedabad at the time only in their honesty and un-guardedness. Although at other times many Gujaratis of much higher social standing than Bharat made sure to denounce the religious ferocity of the Sangh (while still remaining completely silent during the violence to the extent of even refusing conversation with me), I have no doubt they would have agreed with him had they had the courage to speak to me openly. To be sure, Bharat’s explicitness about the legitimacy of punishment was made possible by his sense of protection by the RSS.

A few days later, at a time when one can see private machine guns swung over the shoulders of men on scooters driving over the bridges in the city, Bharat illegally

obtains a pistol with ammunition. Newspapers report incidences of “private firing.” Usually accusations of the private purchase of arms circulate about Muslims, breathing new life into the figure of the dangerous Muslim terrorist armed and ready to kill. Bharat could afford only a cheap country-made revolver. It is, nonetheless, a dangerous weapon. “Everyone would do so,” he claims.

I ask him where he bought the gun. He does not want to tell me, but adds only that he bought it privately through a “friend.” He bought the gun just in case, for “protection” (*rakshaN*). I feel responsible for the purchase as I calculate that he was able to afford the expense only because his lodging is free. I pay rent, food, for nearly everything in the apartment. What if he actually went out and hurt someone with the pistol? I warn him that cheap guns often blow up in face of the shooter, and I claim to have seen this many times in America, the homeland of all guns. He insists he never would take part in any street violence because only the “*lower public*” would do that.

#### 4.2. Bharat, *maryaadaa* and his “weakness”

“*Muslim loko sari manto nahi, maara maryaadaa hoy chhe.*” I do not think well of Muslims. They are my *maryaadaa* (limitation, boundary, modesty), Bharat explains to me. What Bharat means to say is that he does not extend his good will to Muslims. He does not extend his trust to Muslims. Muslims are his *maryaadaa*, the limit beyond which he will not go. For Bharat, Muslims are what he calls, in English, his “*weakness*.”

The term *maryaadaa* appears frequently in our conversations. Pratab, who shares a bedroom with Bharat, uses the term to explain why he sleeps with his mattress in a cautious and unusual position, at a ninety-degree angle to Bharat’s mattress. Men in Gujarat frequently sleep together, and they are not shy of touch or physical contact--in fact, quite the opposite. Pratab began this practice, however, a few weeks after moving into our flat. When I asked about it, he explained to me that

Bharat had “accidentally” embraced him while sleeping; thus he needed to move away from him without being impolite to his superior.

Whenever Pratab elides an answer to a question, he will offer *maryaadaa* as excuse. For example, he refers to *maryaadaa* when he tries to explain why he cannot discuss sexual issues with me in front of Bharat, whom he frequently calls his “Guru” or “*mota bhai*” (big brother). When Bharat is gone, Pratab’s reticence falls away. This relationship between two “brothers” from the same area and caste is structured around certain hierarchies, boundaries, and taboos.

Bharat comes from a family of farmers (*khedut*), but he has left the farm business behind and wants to live in Ahmedabad for good. He never told me so, but I suspect that he made the decision shortly after the sudden death of his father, which elevated him prematurely to the male head in his family. As the oldest son, Bharat has been sent to Ahmedabad to acquire as many degrees as possible. He never regrets living in the city, but he regularly returns to his home village to inspect fields, offer *puja* at the family temple, and to bring ghee back with him.

Farming needs water, and water is scarce in Mahesana. Degrees are abundant, however, and more readily accessible for someone like Bharat, a Jadav. To send the oldest son to become a teacher while the younger one stays at home taking care of the fields is the first step to obtain an urban foothold in government service.<sup>12</sup> In the rural context of Bharat’s *gam* (village), they are not poor or marginal compared to other villagers, such as the landless members of scheduled castes (SCs) or the few households of Muslim Fakirani. Many Jadavs in Vaghada are doing comparatively

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<sup>12</sup>Bharat’s family tried to emulate what they had seen many Patel farmers do generations before them. The Patels of Gujarat were once classified as *shudra* (servant caste), a fact that people will speak of today only cautiously in a city like Ahmedabad. The two main caste branches of Patel are now one of the most economically successful as well as politically powerful groups in all of Gujarat. Many are members of the middle classes or have relatives in the US. The relation and competition between Gujarati Patels and those groups that have successfully managed to claim *kshatriya* or *rajput* status is linked in important ways to the political developments of Gujarat (cf. Shah 1975).



well, but they, as others, need to strategize for the future, especially as the resources for farming are scarce. In any case, the rural as a whole is marginal to the urban, and in order to make it in the city, the currency is not land or water but “education.”

In Vaghada, I am shown a telephone book indexing all surnames of *naroda rajput* households in the entire district. It lists Jadav, Chavda, Dhodiya, Solanki, Parmar--thirty-nine in all.<sup>13</sup> The *naroda rajput* are internally divided by exogamous divisions (*gotra*) according to their respective *kuldevi* (lineage Goddess). Every *gotra* (sub-caste division), called *kuL* or *atak*, has a corresponding lineage Goddess, each with what people refer to as a divine vehicle. These vehicles include many animal carriers, such as Ambema on a tiger, and Bhutbhavanimata on a lion, Kodiarmata on a crocodile, MeLdimata on a goat, Bahucharmata on a rooster, and Assapuramata (no vehicle but often depicted with many pairs of eyes, reminiscent of a spider).

Once it turns out that the *atak* (the kinship sub-division) of the husband of Kotalaben, Bharat's sister, is associated with Bhutbhavani, however, we have to stop our discussion. Bharat's brother-in-law has the same *kuldevi* (lineage goddess) as his wife (Bharat's sister), which is very embarrassing, a little bit like incest. We finally agree that surname (*atak*) and *kuldevi* are perhaps not really on the same level as we thought, thus preserving the veneer of strict exogamy. All these groups are “pure vegetarians” (*shudh shakahari*), Bharat insists firmly.

I find the small phonebook curious as it exclusively lists members of Bharat's own subdivision of *kshatriyas*, the *naroda rajput*. Many Jadav I visit in Vaghada have only this one phonebook at home. Bharat's younger brother, Mahesh, a silent, tightly muscled farmer, tells me that in the district of Surendranagar, the *naroda rajput* are in

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<sup>13</sup>The phonebook is titled “*Shri Naroda Rajpoot Samaj Sanpark 2002*.” It is organized around sub-caste divisions merely within the *naroda rajput* society (*naDoda rajpoot samajni vividh Atako*). Note that the spelling of *naroda* is inconsistent because of pronunciation and transliteration. Sometimes the retroflex “d” (D) becomes “r” in English script and is then this spelling is taken over back into Gujarati script.

the majority (*bahumati*), meaning that their *samaaj* (society) is the largest of all the Kshatriya groups. But in this part of Mahesana, he continues, they unfortunately are not the largest.

I go through with Mahesh all the thirty-nine surnames in the phonebook. A group of village neighbors follows us, visibly enjoying my curiosity about them. As I read one of the *atak* names, I hear muffled laughs. Upon hearing some names, several children can barely resist laughing out loud. The names are KhaTaNa, MasaNi, LimboLa, LambaT, and Tuvar. The adults try to mask their reactions in the presence of Bharat; they hold their mouths and sniffle trying with all their might not to laugh. The scene is funny, full of things unspoken. Finally, I ask Mahesh, who is clearly embarrassed in front of his brother, who says that these specific groups are very rare, the rather unimportant surnames of the *naroda rajput*. They are, in other words, not the majority, as he had earlier asserted. Bharat, catching himself, puts on a straight face and tells me, with an air of condescension that LambaT has as the *mataji* of Limbomataji, the Goddess of lemon. I am not able to find out much more.

At the local level, Bharat's membership in the *naroda rajput* says something different than the dominant discourse on "Hindu" and "majority." Given the diversity and plurality of social divisions of Gujarat, how does one ever unify these differences into single categories? Perhaps the answer is in the very promise of the categories in question.

The *naroda rajput* consider themselves *kshatriya* (and not, for instance, Brahmin), but even within the *kshatriya* (*varna*) category itself, there are several *rajput* groups, like the *naroda rajput* (*jati*) which are in turn again subdivided into smaller, diverse, exogamous units (*atak*). People make fun of some of the subdivisions precisely because of their precarious claim to membership. Even on the level of the *atak*, there remains ambivalence about membership, suggesting

competition between groups. These smaller units (*atako*) are in competition despite marital relations or, as an anthropologists might say, precisely *because* of traditional affinal ties. Marriage can often take the very place of enmity and war.

In other words, the appeal of the dominant discursive terms, which to so many historians and anthropologists familiar with Gujarat's sociological reality seem so dubious, lies in the fact that they eviscerate and thus make disappear what at a lower level is the competitive interplay of diverse social categories (like *varna*, *jati*, *atak*). Likewise, the terms "majority" or "minority" are already constitutive of understandings of relations between lower level membership categories. The differences between particular *atako* (lineages) and their claim to membership in the caste, *jati* (*naroda rajput*), are only overcome on a higher, more inclusive level, the estate (*Darbar*), or the *varna* category (*kshatriya*). In the case of someone like Bharat, one can grasp the universalizing and equalizing appeal of such concepts as "Hindu" and "majority" only if one takes serious this reversed segmentary structure. It is reversed because in the "normal" segmentary structure, decision-making is relegated to lower units that mobilize those above them for action. In this case, the larger units mobilize the lower level memberships into more universalizing categories such as "Hindu," eviscerating their differences. The same operation appears to hold true for the category "Muslim."

The phonebook limits itself to the *naroda rajput*, a caste which is understood to belong to the *kshatriya* *varna*, and allied with other Kshatriyas in a caste consolidation. Bharat and Mahesh explain this consolidation with reference to those groups they consider dominant locally, what they call the "*brahmin-patel*." The Patels are the dominant landowners in the region, and have been consolidating their caste connections and affiliations for a long time. Bharat and his brother gives me the sense that they have transcended their internal divisions. What they do not mention,

however, is that Patel dominance in Gujarat has a great deal to do with water-intensive, groundnut-oil cash cropping, and migration to other countries (initially East Africa and later the U.S.)--an idea that Bharat and his family does not really entertain.

For several decades, however, rural Gujarat has suffered severe bouts of drought. The state is an arid and semi-arid region. Despite exhibiting favorable topographic condition for water recharge through ground water as well as man-made surface storage dam reservoirs, the uninhibited over-drafting of water in the state in the preceding decades has led to a general water shortage and even salinity ingress in coastal regions (cf. Hirway 2002: 24-29). According to the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), water tables have been falling steadily seven feet a year. This water shortage is particularly severe in North Gujarat, Kutch, and North Saurashtra, where people speak no longer of “water drafting” but now of “water mining.” Some of the artificial borewells that sprang up like inversed mushrooms chaotically all over the landscape go as deep as up to 700 feet (210 meters). The consequence of this indiscriminate over-drafting has been a rapid decline of water quality. Mahesana is one of the districts where ground water is now contaminated with excessive fluoride, high salinity, even nitrate in some cases.

In the city, Bharat’s insecurity about the status to which he can aspire leads him to calibrate his behavior strategically, but in his home village and surrounding area, confident of his status, he aspires to be a successful man from a locally respectful family. Amongst his age peers at home--notwithstanding the usual jokes about some of his recently acquired quaint if modish city ways--<sup>14</sup>he does indeed seem to command considerable respect. When I visit Bharat’s family and kin in Vaghada, a village not far from Viramgam, Mahesh proudly shows me sacks full of stored grain (mostly *baajri*, millet) worth more than ten thousands of rupees. We visit a school

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<sup>14</sup>For example, to tire all too fast in the sun while working on the fields, and to reject any form of smoking, *gutka* or *paan*.

friend who decided to become a *sadhu*. He lives as a *brahmacharya* (celibate) at a local Hanuman mandir and worships as a *pujari* (temple priest). Bharat talks to his old friend as if they are two entrepreneurs meet after many years of separation; one is successful in the business of religion, the other in the business of academia. We ride on a fancy blue tractor to inspect and do *puja* for Bahucha Mata --the family *kuldevi* (lineage Goddess)-- at the small temple in the middle of a sizable piece of land. At night, silent Mahesh offers me the *hukkah* and cigarettes to smoke and makes me promise that I won't tell his brother. All the neighbors laugh and giggle.

But when Bharat is in the city, he has a different view of the people and place he comes from. Despite land-ownership, savings from stored agricultural produce, and a high status amongst his village peers, when in the city Bharat considers himself "poor" (*gharib*) and many of his people at home "backward." The Jadav are *naroda rajput*, a *pachhaat varg* (a backward class), classified as OBC (Other Backward Classes).<sup>15</sup> Since the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendation in 1990, twenty-seven percent of government related jobs are reserved for Other Backward Classes such as his.<sup>16</sup> To take advantage of this opportunity the family collectively decided to send their oldest, Bharat, to the city to take up this new challenge.

Bharat, like many of his peers, does not speak English. But the everyday use of Gujarati is so marked with English words, that he cannot avoid also using some English words in conversations, and this English always betrays his low status. Even in use of the word "backwardness," Dasharat does not employ the Gujarati term but instead used the English word with a local twist: "*bekwad*". For someone who speaks

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Parikh (1998: 75).

<sup>16</sup>Until the Mandal Commission recommendations, the thirty one percent quota had been divided between seven per cent for scheduled castes, fourteen percent for scheduled tribes, and ten percent for other backward classes. The Commission suggested an eighteen per cent increase for the latter category (Sheth and Menon 1986:16).

no English, however, he is very astute in the selection of English words, as are many non-English speaking Gujaratis who move from the country to an urban milieu. Many quotidian adjectives associated with groups considered backward, like *halka loko* (low people), for example, conjure up something dirty and disgusting from which Bharat always painstakingly wants to distance himself.

Bharat explains that Jadavs are “*bekwad*” but not “*halka*” (backward but not inferior) they are perhaps “*abhaN*” but not “*nich*” (illiterate but not low). *Nich* is a term he reserves for groups like Vaghri, Bhangis, and Thakor, that is, specific groups amongst the scheduled castes and tribes (STs, SCs). Accordingly he will never call his own caste low or inferior, but only *bekwad*, while being less careful when describing other groups. The expression “*halka loko*” (inferior people; *halku* means low, thin, light) is usually contrasted with “*ujliyat loko*” (high people, literally “the radiant people”), members of either traditionally higher castes or successful communities like Brahmin, Bania, or Patel respectively.

In our daily conversations Bharat often would refer to his *maryaadaa* as his “weakness,” a term he did not use when talking with Pratab or other men. This weakness--a space within him which he maintains as unreflected—found no expression in his village but must instead have developed, or become concrete, after he arrived in the city. It seems as if his Brahmin professor and “Guru,” had initially identified this “weakness” as a strong disdain for Muslims and explicitly told him to live with me, a foreigner with a Muslim (Persian) name, in order to overcome it.

But while Bharat follows the professor’s advice to live with me, and thus struggles with his weakness, he does not overcome it. On the one hand, his views conform to the dominant discourse in central Gujarat, which includes an adamant rejection of Muslims. On the other hand, he identifies me--his vice-ridden, higher-status, light-skinned, German-born, American-educated, roommate--as a Muslim, and

he has trouble making sense of me. In fact, despite all the vices I engage in, some of which, like meat consumption, are stereotypical for Muslims, he comes to like me genuinely as a friend.

To befriend and even live with a meat-eater, like myself, is to risk association with a “lower category.” Yet I, identified as Muslim, also command a handsome status that puzzles Bharat. It reminds him of what he lacks precisely because he so aspires to it himself. Bharat’s near reverence for some of the status that I have leads him to overlook the real reason for his weakness: He a farmer in the city, an OBC (other backward classes), in a society which harbors many silent prejudices against people like him, rural villagers known for their “roughness” (*asanskari, dhamaaliyu*) and fundamental inertness (*tamasi*).

Bharat is not a great ideologue, believer, or expounder of ideas. He does not collect arguments for debates. He never expends many words to explain his convictions. He does not have an elaborate explanation for why he believes Islam is a bad religion, or for why Muslims have historically been deceptive and betrayed the Hindus, or for why Muslim men treat their women so badly. This negative discourse on Islam and Muslims surrounds him, but it seems not to bother him, and he makes no direct use of it. He leaves elaborate ideological statements to people who know, like his Patel and Brahmins superiors, or to leaders in organizations like the RSS.

Bharat is, therefore, unguarded in discussions. His convictions just exist; he needs no argumentative fortifications for them. His anti-Muslim prejudices appear more as visceral reactions, spontaneous add-ons. But this lack of depth in rhetoric does not shake the firmness of his convictions, fed, as they are less by argument than collective sentiment. He knows he does not like Muslims because they are identified socially as a threat. He is afraid of that aspect in Muslims which makes them not-Hindu. It is the same something that he identifies in members of lower castes: lack of

restraint (which, in Chapter eight, Sejal described as lack of vulnerability), lack of self-control. Ultimately, Bharat's unguarded naivety mingled with an unassuming honesty makes our friendship possible. He trusts his own emotions and experience more than words and sentences.

#### 4.2.1 Ruins, Shame, and Stolen Women: impressions of Krishna's birthday

When I visit Bharat in Vaghada during the Krishna Janmashtami, a festival of Krishna's birth, we go to a stunning Munsar Lake (Manasar Sarovar) near Viramgam. Walking through the ruins of an old temple complex and gazing over the still water he tells me, here, while in college, he used to study with friends. Bharat tells me there are 360 temples all dedicated to the matajis (Mother Goddesses). We see figurines, whose bodily features look as if they have been broken. I ask him why there are so many never cement temples surrounding the lake, when the old historical ones lie completely abandoned. Close to where we sit there is a particularly ugly concrete structure, a Shiva temple with loud colors and a simplistic rectangular symmetry.

He tells me that Muslim invaders destroyed the entire temple complex. A few hours later, we have tea at the home of his paternal uncle. There, his own paternal grandmother tells me, in what must have been an embarrassing moment for Bharat, that the complex was not destroyed at all but had been abandoned and replaced by the newer, more colorful concrete temples, erected all around the old structures in the last decade. Bharat remains silent while she tells me that the whole game of building temples has to do with land-grabbing, something other Gujaratis have told me many times. The temples were built to control the land surrounding the lake. A renovation of the historical structures, on the other hand, would probably have restricted the reach of the temple complex, as renovating historical structures implies some form of government intervention and consideration of outside interests.



I later find out that the artificial Munsar tank used to have the shape of a conch shell. It was surrounded by 500 hundred little historical sandstone structures (former temples) built under Siddharaja in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was a Vaishnava temple. A shrine in the east was dedicated to Shiva, whereas a shrine in the West was dedicated to Vishnu (Rangarajan 1990:44). Today there are no deities installed.

During the festival Bharat takes me to a temple adjacent to his home village, yet another religious space inscribed with the contentious history of Hindu-Muslim relations. It is called Fuldai and run by Ahirs (an agricultural caste), financed by their urban caste affiliates. When we take *darshan* of *baal* Krishna, the God in the famous form of a small child (*baalak*) situated in a swing (*hitcheko*), we rock the swing with the deity inside back and forth a few times instead of crossing eyes with the divine. After *darshan* we wander through the *mela* (that part of a religious festival which is commercial) to a large tree on a little hill overlooking a small basin.

Bharat says a part of the local “*itihasi*” (history) might interest me. Next to a dried out *talav* (lake) under a large tree, he recounts emotionally that hundreds of years ago the Ahirs from Saurashtra lived here. A Muslim raja (King) saw a most beautiful Ahir lady. A very pretty. The raja wanted her. He proposed to her for marriage, but she resisted his impious entreaties. The Muslim king tried to entice her by telling her she would be treated like a queen and could demand anything she wanted. But the lady was a true Hindu, Bharat explains, and did not want to marry a Muslim even though there were obvious economic and political advantages for her should she agree. The raja was disappointed and did not accept the decision of the poor women to turn down a King’s offer. He started to terrorize the village of the Ahir lady’s people. She then drowns herself in the nearby lake because she could not stand her people suffering just because of her beauty. That is where the temple is situated today.

There is no water in front of us, and Bharat fears, I will not believe him, but he assures me, at the spot we are standing was once a lot of water. I do believe him, however, as a basin is clearly visible. It is as if the absence of the water in the lake is the truth of the story. Bharat's grandfather offers a different version of local history. He tells me that in former times the relationships with the local Muslim aristocratic elite (whose descendants now live in "Amerika") had been cordial and friendly.

The affinal relationships in Bharat's rural world reveal many boundaries of *maryaadaa* and structural tensions expressed in terms of honor and shame. For example, during the festival in his village, only those *rajput* women originally from other villages (from a different *atak*), are obliged to veil in front of natal men. The unmarried daughters or natal women who occasionally visit do not. This veiling is called *laaj* ("*laaj kaaDhe chhe*"), a word simultaneously connoting "shame, honor, modesty, deference" (GED). Local forms of purdah, called *paDdo* (screen or curtain, a form of purdah) and usually a sign of nobility, are commonly practice by Rajputs in mainland Gujarat and Saurashtra. I witnessed such taboos within a family unit usually enacted between the older brother and the younger-brother's wife, suggesting formerly practiced forms of levirate in case of the younger brother's death. Usually the sister-in-law strictly refrains from addressing the husband's older brother. She avoids his gaze and covers her hair and face with her *dupaTTo* (scarf) in his presence.<sup>17</sup> Bharat gives *laaj* a slightly different twist, however, broadening its scope considerably, and employing it to establish his relation to Muslim women also, as we shall see in a moment.

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<sup>17</sup>Many Muslim women from lower caste and class background, especially in rural areas, are hardly distinguishable from Hindu women in questions of veiling. Even the most experienced observer might not be able to distinguish them in public spaces. I have lived extensively amongst Muslims in rural North Gujarat, whose women never wore the *burkho* (burqua) but only the *paDdo* or *laaj*, and whose faces were thus always visible unless they used a veil to cover them in front of a guest or a saint.

Bharat explains that the women who have married into his home village cannot show their face to those who are “*upar*” (above them), which are all the natal men of the village, because they have been shamed (*sharamaave chhe*). “She cannot look (meet the gaze), cannot interact, and cannot talk to me. It is *maryaadaa*,” he says. In his typical Gujarati, he tells me, “*All women je vaghada ni chokri chhe, te purush ni laaj kaTHTHi nathi. Vaghada na chokra ni misses, moTa purusho ni laaj kaThThe chhe*” (All women that are from Vaghada do not veil in front of men, but wives have to veil in front of the elderly and respected men).

They are “*niche*” (low) and cannot show their face. That is why these women do “*laaj*” in front of us men, he explains. I ask them why they are “*nich*,” since they are all *rajput* women of the same caste. He tells me because they were made into Jadav by marriage, in other words, they were married into the group. They carry the shame (*sharam* means also blot, stigma) of having crossed the boundary, the limits of *atak* (*atakaav* means also hindrance, obstacle and menses). For Bharat, marital ties can be humiliating ties. Even his mother lets *laaj* down when his *dada* (paternal grandfather) comes. His sister won’t veil when she is here, as she is from the village. When the women dance, they remain visibly marked as outsiders.

Bharat’s understanding of the implicit agonism and humiliation in marital alliances in his home village Vaghada, was brought home to me when I once asked him why Muslim women veil. In September 2002, we were standing at an overcrowded bus station at Gita Mandir in Ahmedabad, facing many *burqua*-clad Muslim women, whose faces and entire bodies were concealed under black cloth. Since the pogroms I had perceived a strong tendency of Muslim women to attempt a complete separation from the society around them through ardent veiling when outside their own communities.

To my astonishment Bharat used the logic of *laaj* to explain why Muslim women wear the *burkho* (veil covering face or entire body, a form of *purdah*). Bharat tells me they are “stolen women,” stolen from the Muslims, or seduced, and then forcefully married, which is to say, converted.<sup>18</sup> They have to hide their faces because of the shame, which they carry in the same way that the affinal women in his village hide their faces before villagers like himself. When I start to disagree he interrupts and explains this logic: When the police arrest a thief (*chor*) and he is brought to the court, or shown on TV, he is going to be veiled. The criminal always has to cover his face, he says. *Goondas* (criminals), when arrested, have their face covered. They are ashamed, “*sharam laage chhe, izzat nathi*” (they are ashamed, they have no honor). “If you are a powerful man, you have honor (*izzat*) and you can strike someone down, you are respected. But when you are arrested for the same act, you are not.” He says: “If you hit me, I will be low. Everyone will say: you are powerful. But if the police arrested you, then you are the one who will be low. You will be the one shamed. You have been high and had *izzat* for 2 minutes only,” he laughs.

He explains to me that all Muslim women were converted to Islam a long time ago. It was “*dharmparivartan*” (conversion), he is using an officious word. Whenever Bharat employs this sort of language, it seems to me as if another voice inhabits him, as if his experience is made to fit words in that very instant. He continues, after being defeated in this way, they were ashamed, and to this day they cannot show their faces anymore because it became a custom. Like a thief, they have to veil their faces, as there is too much shame on them.

In Bharat’s logic, Muslim women veil in front of the society they were converted into. He understands the Muslim women’s custom of veiling to address

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<sup>18</sup>As for many Gujaratis, marriage and conversion are synonymous because “religion” (*dharma*) is not simply a matter of “belief” (*maanyata*) but of group membership, which implies much more than just philosophical or spiritual orientation. It implies social organization: what one does, who one marries, what one eats, and with whom one interacts on what basis.

their own men. It is to those that converted them, that they owe their shame to, because it is they that defeated their honor. But, then, Bharat also knows very well that Muslim women veil because of him, a stranger looking at them. He knows that their veil is supposed to control his gaze. The *rajput* women in Vaghada cover their face in front of those men they theoretically could have been wives of, like other men structurally in the same position as their husbands, and especially their husband's older brothers who they have to avoid completely, following the rules of *maryaadaa*. The reason is the inherent structural tension between affinals and the potential for substitutability in an alliance system, a system that retains an agonist moment; marriage has probably replaced war and conflict between the exchanging groups. The Rajput women who were married, might as well have been married to the elder brother, or another villager (all relatives), that would not change the system at all. The taboo (*laaj*), and thus the sexual tension whose potentialities it tries to control, emerges precisely where substitution is perfectly possible and conceivable.

Thus Bharat interprets Muslim women's *burqua* as if they were Rajput *laaj*. He not only stresses the shame and humiliation of "Hindu" women through defeat and incorporation into Muslim society, but more significantly, he implicitly transposes the same relation to all Muslim women that he holds for *rajput* women married to Jadav brethren in his home village. The *burkho* (burqua) for him underwrites the taboo (*marayaadaa*), a taboo only established because transgressing it would make so much good sense: after all, Muslim women are really "Hindu women" and thus he could have them. He misunderstands *burkho* in the register of *laaj*.

We can see here how the logic of substitution that defines marital alliances is transposed onto Muslim women to symbolically appropriate them. Muslim women are on the other side of the boundary of *maryaadaa* not at all because they are so absolutely "other," but because they were defeated, taken, stolen. For Bharat these

black-veiled women (“invisible”) are not beyond the pale at all. Rather, they are calling out for him. They could be his. And the more they try to stay away from him by veiling, the more he senses their perception of his gaze.

#### 4.2.2 Hyperbolic vegetarianism: the malady of *allagi*

Whenever we meet Mr. Bipinbhai, the landlord of our apartment building, Bharat is sure to show a sort of natural deference and humility. Bipinbhai is a successful Patel, who sports a three-foot-sized Bal-Krishna marble statue in the living-room of his two story house, which is flanked by a rare silver Mercedes Benz in the garage, and surrounded by a miraculously green garden in a city chronically short of portable water. Bipin is a strict teatotaler and like many hosts in Ahmedabad, he may offer tea to guests but will rarely take any himself.

On a visit Bharat always declines to take tea, explaining that he stopped taking tea at the advice of his “Guru,” a University Professor and his academic advisor, a Brahmin. He might piously add that it was, in any case, a foreign custom. He shows the same behavior towards other academic superiors and other authorities of social importance, like the Swamiji in his home village, who is the spiritual teacher of his young *brahmachari* school friend, or Anand, the Brahmin son of a local industrialist of the city. Bipin, and others, are always astonished at Bharat’s refusal, to which he adds that he also fasts three times a week eating only *anaaj* (wheat), *ghee* (clarified butter), and *goL* (sweet molasses).<sup>19</sup> Far from being disingenuous, Bharat communicates a whole series of unspoken values under and between the words that he speaks. Besides the abstention from tea and pious fasting, he is also saying that he is *shuddh shakahari* (pure vegetarian), does not smoke cigarettes, *bidis*, or the *hukkah*

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<sup>19</sup>If the people Bharat talks with are interlocutors considered “higher” who drink tea and smoke cigarettes themselves, then under certain circumstances he can also risk appearing arrogant and claiming superiority in an improper way.

(like his uncle or brother), nor is he likely to take “drinks” (he always uses the plural), *gutka* (tobacco chew) or *paan* (betel leaf).

Vices come in clusters in Gujarat, and they are believed to reveal something about the essence of the person who engages in them. Bharat calls them *dushaNo* (vices, nuisances), a word that he picked up from his geography schoolteacher, a Brahman in his home village, who uses the word all the time when we visit him in Vaghada.<sup>20</sup> Vices are an attachment to a bad practice, “a fond devotion of bad habit,” and are thought to reveal the innate quality of a person (*guna*).<sup>21</sup> By implication, one vice always implies another, ultimately leading to a series of addictions (*tevo*). If someone “takes drinks” (*daru le chhe*), it is unlikely that he will not take *gutka* or not smoke a cigarette if offered. It is as unlikely that one addiction will not automatically lead to another addiction as it is improbable that wearing a fancy “*pant-shirt*” (tucked-in shirt with pleated long pants) with dusty *champal* (sandals, flip flops) will make an impression on anyone. At the extreme end of this series of vices is the consumption of meat and the engagement in illicit sex.

But vices (*vyasan*) not only accumulate and collect around certain individuals lacking resistance to them. By extension they also expand to entire categories of people naturally prone to them. It is thus important for Bharat to be adamant about his resistance to vices, because his name, Jadav, reveals a caste, which is potentially associated with stigmas. In the case of Jadav, who call and consider themselves

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<sup>20</sup>The word *dushaN* is also used in the term *pradushan*, which is the official Gujarati term for “environmental pollution” (cf. TAD).

<sup>21</sup>The etymology of *vyasan* is unknown to me, but the TMGED defines it as “habit,” “practice,” “a fond devotion of bad habit,” and “the being attached to a bad course of conduct.” *GuNa*, in turn, is “innate quality or property,” “nature,” “virtue,” as well as “merit.” The term is complex as it implies, “one of the three properties of created things, *satva* (truth), *raj* (dust), and *tam* (darkness)” (cf. TMGED). *Guna* is also often used in the sense of “effect,” *guNvun* denotes “to multiply,” and *guNanafaL* is “the product obtained by multiplication.” I suspect the multiplication of vices and bad practices (*vyasano*), addictions and habits (*tevo*), must finally lead to *durguNi*, an adjective for “vicious,” “wicked,” “possessing bad qualities” like the dangerous Goddess Durga (cf. TMGED, GED).

*rajput*, notably alcohol, smoking, and to a lesser degree, meat consumption is connoted.

Initially Bharat insisted vehemently that all Jadav are and have always been strict vegetarians, with a few impious exceptions. But after we talk with his paternal grandfather and other older members of his village, he changes his mind and acknowledges that an older generation did eat meat once in a while. Some members of Bharat's village finally tell me that up to fifty-percent of them still do ("*maas khaai chhe*") eat meat, but the meat eaters amongst them all live in other villages far away. It is not respectable behavior, they say. After hearing these conversations, Bharat settles on a new opinion and when we are back into the city: He admits only to fifty-percent of all *kshatriya* (warrior classes) in effect were engaging in meat-eating regularly ("*non-veg khaai chhe*"). With the help of his Brahmin geography teacher Dhodiya visiting his former student in Ahmedabad, we finally have to settle the matter. The Jadav being farmers were always vegetarians, but the other Kshatriya caste that Bharat often refers to, the Jhalas, used to be, and according to Bharat still are, the great meat eaters. As Kings the Jhalas they had to protect the people from Muslim invasion, for example. They needed the *shakti* (power) that the ingestion of meat begets, I am told.<sup>22</sup>

Once Bharat described to me the first time he saw raw meat. There was, he says, an original, conscious moment when he realized that it was actually meat that he was looking at. Bharat avows to have never eaten meat, but in 1998, two years after he had come to Ahmedabad, he recounts the harrowing original experience of *seeing* meat.

One day he went to Lal Darwaja and by accident walked right into the chicken market near "Gandhi Cold Drinks" at Patwa Sheri, a small lane with fish and meat

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<sup>22</sup>This answer is a common rationalization for meat consumption in the past. *Shakti* is "female power," which the King receives from the Goddess in order to rule (Tambs-Lyche 1992).



shops in the old city's center.<sup>23</sup> "I got sick (*bimaar*), disgust overwhelmed me (*traas thai chhe*). I saw a raw chicken (*chicken joi*). I had no idea what I was getting into. I walked right into the area. Suddenly I saw something hanging from a hook, just next to me. I looked up and he saw it hanging. 'This is a chicken,' I thought. 'This is a chicken.' Then I began to gag." Bharat's face becomes serious, and he portrays his reaction quite brutally. He gags several times to show me what he means. The light steel armchair on which he is sitting cracks under his gagging movements. "Feeling nauseous, I sat down after the gagging (*uubako*). I had to catch my breath. Then I vomited (*uulti*), and someone brought him a glass of water (*walla paani apia*)." Still today Bharat claims to see this raw chicken all the time.

Was it a Muslim who gave him the water, I ask him? "No," he says and makes a face. "Of course, it was a Hindu." I regret the idiocy of my question immediately; this area has a mixed flow of people but most meat shops and butcheries are run by Muslims. "I sat there for 5 minutes," he says. "Then I returned the same way I came, and I have never gone back into this area of the city again. For three days, I could not eat. I always saw the chicken on my plate."<sup>24</sup> I found it interesting that the chicken, in his recurrent visions, was now on a plate instead of a hook. "I could not eat," he says. Later, he told me that he could not eat for an entire week after the episode. That day he had eaten "*roti, daal, baat, shaak*" [bread, pulses, rice, vegetables, his usual staple

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<sup>23</sup>Patwa Sheri is a fish market flanking Bhatiyar Gali, the meat market in the old city center next to Tran Darwaja. Patwa Sheri and Bhatiyar Gali are joined at a revolting garbage heap, which provides food to dogs, cats, and other animals. The smell of the heap sometimes penetrates unpleasantly into the meat stands and surrounding eating places. The special concentration of meat and fish shops as well as restaurants in one small area (one *gali* and the adjacent *sheri*), allows for a formidable confinement of the spectacle of meat. One can walk through it and see "it," or one can avoid it. In consequence, residents of the city who want to describe something horrendous in matters of food and butchering will often refer to these two lanes, although slaughterhouses and restaurants are found in many other places of the city as well. There is always a hyperbole when describing Bhatiyar Gali or Patwa Sheri, be it positively or negatively. Some residents, for example, will sometimes claim that the food is particularly good here. Those who know the city a little better, will know this not to be true.

<sup>24</sup>Bharat exited the lane the very same way the food existed his body. In both cases the directionality is reversed: it is backwards, *bekwad*. Vomiting is *uulti* but *uultu* means also "inverse, contrary, turned inside out" (cf. GED).

food]. “People were standing around wondering what had come over me (*kem ene avu tayu?*).”

I try to ask him what exactly made him gag. Was it the blood? Did he see the blood? Bharat is angry at my question. “All,” he snorts, as if it is self-understood. “The blood, the flesh (*lohi, maas.... Ye un-necessary chhe. Kudarati nati*) “This is not necessary, it is not natural.” He tells me he does not want to see a *bakro* (goat) or even beef (*maas*). It was not their time to die, he says. Thus it is unnatural. They were killed. Later, I ask him about smell. He makes a face, “I tried not to breathe.” I invite him to come with me to the *pol* [lane] again, but he insists, “never.”

I ask Pratab about Bharat’s experience with meat. He laughs. Then he coyly says I will talk about it tomorrow. I will not talk about it now because Bharat is present. “It is *maryaadaa*,” he says. He only tells me that for “*Brahmin ane VaNiya, e kharab chhe, kalakhaNu*” (for Brahmins and Baniyas, meat eating is bad, a bad sign).<sup>25</sup> The next day Pratab explains: Bharat suffers from what is called *allagi*—a Gujarati translation of the English “allergy.” Although he is a vegetarian himself, he insists “*mane allagi nati*” (I do not suffer from *allagi*).

Pratab recounts how, before he came to live with us, he lived with fifteen others in a hostel, “They were *thakor, darbar, parmar, koli*, all Kshatriyas and most ate meat.”<sup>26</sup> Only five of them were vegetarians, including me. This was in Jivraj Park in South West Ahmedabad, in a *kshatriya samaj ni hostel* [a hostel of the Kshatriya society] run by Gujarat University. My student colleagues ate lots of *inda* (eggs) especially on Fridays, and lots of chicken.” When they ate chicken and eggs, Pratab had no problem sitting next to them. They all ate together, although he always ate vegetarian. “*Mane allagi nati*” (I do not suffer from *allagi*), Pratab proudly repeats,

<sup>25</sup>The term *kalk* means “dirt” as well as “sin;” *kalank* means a “blot, stigma, accusation, fault;” *kalanki* means contaminated and polluted (cf. TMGED, GED).

<sup>26</sup>Note how Pratab is agglomerating diverse categories of estate, caste, and surname (*atak*) as “*kshatriya*,” for those who eat meat.

and puts his hand in front of his mouth, now resembling a beak, as if he smells something. He then wiggles his hand in the typical “no” gesture. “I can take it—[the smell of meat]—when I see or smell *gosh* (meat).”

This is not the only time I hear of *allagi*. Once, after eating a late afternoon lunch in an empty non-vegetarian restaurant near Sidi Sayid Jhaali Masjid in the old city, I talk to the vice-manager, Mr. Gowda who sits bored at the cash counter. I have visited his restaurant several times-- its kebabs are delicious—and in the last few weeks have become acquainted with the manager. Usually restaurant owners in fancy establishments do not like my probing questions, and they hurry to get rid of me. In Ahmedabad there is something immodest in asking about the culinary preferences of people in non-vegetarian restaurants. But Mr. Gowda seems to enjoy talking to me as, he says it, business is slow due to the “riots.”

I ask him why the interiors of so many fancy non-vegetarian restaurants in Ahmedabad are so dark (*andhaRu*)? My question prompts the five service personnel to stare and smile. Saying the obvious Mr. Gowda responds, so that no one can look inside and see what is being eaten (see Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 2. Hotel-restaurant near Lal Darwaja



Figure 3. Restaurant in Maninagar



Figure 4. Restaurant in Nehrubridge with friend. Note that Figures 2-4 depict three different non-vegetarian restaurants catering to a Hindu and Jain middle-class clientele.

I had expected such an answer. I wonder aloud if the darkness might also prevent the guests from seeing what each other are eating. Or, perhaps, guests do not

want to see what they themselves eat. I had already perceived the tendency in some upper- and middle-scale restaurants to provide seclusion through cubicles, murky lightning, curtains, or family rooms into which guests (some whom are love couples) could disappear into privacy. Often this seclusion behind dark glass or in an upstairs is an attempt to shield women from men's gazes. But it also appears to be a strategy to shield middle class non-Muslim clientele from curious eyes while eating.

Mr. Gowda is very familiar with the "allergy syndrome." He has seen and experienced it many times. He describes: A group of Jains enters the restaurant. They are seated and begin to order food. Then they see something on a neighboring table. They hold their mouths and say, "You should have told us!" They leave. They might even get angry. They say, "We had no idea!" Mr. Gowda elicits a tortured face in lieu of what he would like to say about that statement. He must remain polite to the customer, he says. Some of them know very well what food he serves, he asserts, but they truly cannot bear the sight of something like Tandoori Chicken, and they lose their appetites. Others are so naïve that they think there should always be a sign outside saying "non-veg restaurant." Some complain, he says, that this is not a "normal" restaurant. In Gujarat a "normal" restaurant would be vegetarian by default.

Mr. Gowda himself is vegetarian. "I never take it," he emphatically states. But, like Pratab, he experiences no discomfort sitting with someone eating meat. "Why should I have a problem? I am not eating it," he says. Mr. Gowda comes from South India and has lived in Ahmedabad now for fifteen years. He speaks fluent Indian-inflected English. There is a "vegetarian majority" he explains, which has arisen in the last 10 years. It wasn't there before. Before 1992 things were different, he remembers. In 1992 Gujarat witnessed severe riots in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. "Nowadays, they are conscious, more people eat veg," he explains. Gujaratis have become more and more vegetarian.

He describes what he considers the most important differences in eating patterns between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus associate meat eating often with alcohol consumption, which Muslims usually do not.<sup>27</sup> “Muslims eat more of dry items, and their appetite is much more. They generally eat soupe and dry items together.” Some Gujarati meat eaters shun dry items, like Tandoori Chicken, Chicken Tikka pieces, or Tangdi Kebab, because the flesh is so visible, and the dishes often includes bones. Pieces of meat usually disappear more readily in the soupe dish (a thin gravy), then in the case of a dry item (see Figure 5). What is significant here is the visibility of the meat that is to be eaten. Even Gujaratis who do eat meat regularly avoid the visibility of meat-dishes and prefer more soupy items. Then comes the main dish and rotis (bread). “Hindus eat two to three rotis only, with gravy; then they are finished. For Hindus bone or boneless is no problem. But Jains will leave even if they just see bones.”

Mr. Gowda blames everything on the Jains. “It is these Jains and their Swaminarayan,” he says. He confuses Jain religion with the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*, which is actually a Vaishnava sect quite distinct from Jainism. Yet Mr. Gowda is correct in an indirect way. The two existing branches of the Swaminarayan tradition are indeed strictly vegetarian and, in addition to abstaining from “flesh food,” its members also shun garlic and onion, as do all Jains and many higher caste Hindus. “They only keep hesitations,” Gowda grumbles. By this he means that Jains overdo it with food taboos, that is, instead of a selection of tabooed food items, they hold on to the bare impulse of taboo (“They only keep hesitations”). He asserts that something

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<sup>27</sup>Vices are understood to come in clusters in Gujarat. Many restaurant and hotel owners in the city complain about the fact that Hindu or Jain customers often insist on *daru* (alcohol) when they consume “non-veg” (the usual idiom for non-vegetarian meat dishes). Alcohol cannot be sold legally in any Gujarati establishment because there is an official policy of Prohibition implemented since 1961 (Bombay Prohibition Act of 1949). The prohibition does not stop sale and widespread consumption of alcohol in the state however. By 2005 an absurd number of 12 lakh (1.2 Million) cases are pending with the Gujarat authorities involving illicit liquor consumption or distribution alone. Most of the cases (80%) involve “affluent groups,” members of higher classes (<http://us.rediff.com/money/2005/feb/24guj.htm>, accessed March 8, 2005).

happens when they see bones. “That is what these Swaminarayan preachings have done. There is a psychological effect,” he says. “That’s all. It is all psychological.”



Figure 5. Muslim meat stands in Ahmedabad. Note the redness of the meat.

Mr. Gowda’s reference to Swaminarayan is relevant because the *sampradaya* (sect, tradition, practice) has not only been preaching a very strict form of vegetarian abstention since its inception in the 19th century and thus competing with Vaniyas (Jain and Hindu merchant groups) and Brahmans for purity. As Gujarat’s largest Vaishnavite Hindu sect, it has also been associated with the rise to prominence of the Patidar caste (Patels) in Gujarati politics (Hardiman 1988) —once referred to as *shudra*-- and has been an active agent of a specific version of Sanskritization (Tambs-Lyche 1992, 1982). It is engaged in many social reform efforts like de-addiction

programs, vegetarianism, and the complete abolition of animal-sacrifice. In 1981 it inaugurated members of lower castes as ascetics (Williams 2001). Due to its immense popular success amongst lower groups it paved the way to a much broader appeal in discourse and practice of vegetarianism, which Mr. Gowda now perceives as the emergence of a “vegetarian majority.”<sup>28</sup>

Bharat’s Patel, Bania, or Brahmin acquaintances let him know how much they appreciate that he behaves like a very exceptional Jadav. Nowadays many urban Jadavs behave exceptionally, meaning that they hold to ascetic behaviors (“hesitations”) not traditionally practiced by their group, or if, then evaluated in a different frame of reference. Bharat’s refusal to drink tea, however, is unlike his abstention from meat in that tea does not disgust him. He merely abstains for the recognition he receives from others. Abstaining from tea simply indicates other more significant departures. I have had teas with Bharat before he started abstaining. The immediate reward for such a behavior is acknowledgment the long-term reward is what Bharat calls, “*emni sathe saband raakhe chhe*” (I keep relations with them). *Sambandh* (relations) with members of urban groups Bharat considers influential can translate directly into considerations for jobs.

The city acts on Bharat like a veritable cultural colander, straining out certain aspects of himself while others become more pronounced in a new relationship to higher castes, classes, and his perceivable position in a *Hindu rashtra* (Hindu nation). To abstain from eating meat clearly distinguishes Bharat from both caste brethren and lower castes, where there is a certain easygoingness about *dushano* (vices). It also distinguishes him dramatically from Gujarati Muslims, for whom meat-eating practices today have come to signify defiance and identity creation in a way similar to what beef consumption at times does for Dalit groups. Even if no or only very little

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<sup>28</sup>Srinivas (1962) already mentioned this sect in the context of Sanskritization in Gujarat.



meat was eaten historically, as seems to be the case for the Jadav, who are farmers, the identification of behaviors considered inferior (*halku*) by upper caste and middle class urban groups remains strong. Bharat stems himself with all his might against these stigmas over-performing where he can to best achieve positive results.

Mr. Gowda hones in on an important experience in his description of the enigma of Hindu and Jain middle class customers, who enter a non-vegetarian restaurant in order to consume meat (often in conjuncture with alcohol), but then exit after seeing bones and pieces of meat. “They keep only hesitation” is a form of *allagi*, a condition where the object (the allergens) no longer controls the disease. Instead, the entire subject is put at risk. Meat abstention is one of those aspects about which Bharat seems to have no uncertainties. His affect of disgust appears brutally simple, but his disgusted affection, or affection for disgust, remains highly equivocal. Not that he ever actually ate meat, but the significance he gives to his complete abstention is much stronger and more elaborate than in many of his own village peers, especially those of an older generation. Something in Bharat cannot let go of meat. It is quite obvious that Bharat expends much more energy than others to stave off the way meat addresses him (*Anspruch*, claim, demand, challenge).

Julia Kristeva (1982:1) maintains that “the abject is not an object,” the abject is not something that can be named, imagined, and thus tamed. It does not allow for the “I” to remain autonomous or detached. “The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to *I*.” What is Bharat attempting to relieve himself of as he retraces his way back through Patwa Sheri (*uultu*) in order to reverse his encounter with a raw chicken? What is opposed to the “I” here? Bharat never actually ingested any meat. It may be that he is trying to relieve himself of the very sight of meat that penetrated through his eyes deeply into his body. But why then does he collapse in

front of it, in the meat's presence? And why does he recollect the chicken no longer on the hook but suddenly on his plate as if he was going to eat it?

#### 4.2.2.1 Paralyzing confluence

Despite the historical influence of vegetarian Vaishnava traditions, Jainism, and the salience of Mahatma Gandhi in Gujarat, meat eating is not simply associated with disgust and abjection. After my prying into the subject, Bharat's village teacher, a Brahman, explained that meat used to be eaten by those that rule because it is necessary in order to provide *shakti* (the power of the Goddess). Meat is associated with the abject, but it is also carrier of a potency, and can signify power. It is a basic insight of classic anthropological theory that what is poisonous and impure in one context, is magical potentiality (power) in the next (Robertson Smith 1898, Durkheim 1912, Mary Douglas 1966).

That meat is also power is not a surprising statement in rural as well as urban Gujarat at all. I have encountered this logic in many contexts, including in the way members of lower castes explain, legitimize, and rationalize their own practices of meat consumption. Meat consumption is often talked about in the context of need of strength (*tame joie chhe*) similarly to sex, which is often talked about in the context of release. Certain categories of people need it more than others, and react to the ingested substance in diverse ways.

In 1995, during fieldwork amongst villagers in Banaskantha (North Gujarat, today part of Patan district), Chandubhai, a 41-year-old Brahmin in a village near Radhanpur explained to me:

“The blood of Rajput is hot. They are *kshatriya* [of the warrior class]. The blood of Brahmins is cold. Brahmins do not fight. (...). If you mix Rajput blood with Brahmin blood you get neither a good Rajput, nor a good Brahmin. You get something in-between. T'is nothing, same as a *hijra*. [eunuch]

Rajputs eat meat. Rabaris [local group affiliated to *kshatriya*] do not eat meat, nor do they drink [alcohol] because Brahmins have told them so. (...). But (...) in the past, Rajputs (...) did eat meat because they needed a hot mind to kill (...). If you don't kill animals, you have too much *daya* (pity). If you eat meat, you see blood and you are hot, and ready to fight."<sup>29</sup>

Chandubhai is self-congratulatory when he claims that Brahmins would tame that very power by their control over those that are prone to ingest it (Rajput or Kshatriya). Moreover, he argues that to mix the two poles *brahmaN* and *kshatriya*, one gets something in-between, a *hijra*, who he considers bad, neither this nor that. A *hijra* is a member of a social class that act as ritual specialists. Being often identified as eunuchs, they provide magical means of fertility and are perceived as neither man nor woman, inhabiting a unique third gender.<sup>30</sup> Yet, there are two insights in his comments. First, meat ingestion (or seeing blood) can result in, or is indicative of, power --heat-- that often has to be tamed or controlled once evoked. Meat consumption not only defines the wretched, but also the noble, the royal, the King. It is a form of heat, which provides power similar to the ritual heat of *tejas* and *tapas* achieved by the ascetic through sexual abstention (*brahmacharya*, or celibacy). Ascetic techniques imply radical forms of semen retention, which then is believed to rise to the head and metamorphose into subtle matter.<sup>31</sup> The ascetic is independent of the world and unifies all aspects of the world onto himself in order to transcend it (which means also to have power over it). The ascetic or renouncer is his own sovereign and the sacrifice is internalized into his body.

As we have seen in chapter one, already in the Vedic sacrifice seeing blood, or eating meat, produced dangerous heat, as did the entire act of killing, which had to be

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<sup>29</sup>With some omissions and changes for purposes of readability, this is a direct quote from my Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, "Muslimische Heiligenverehrung in Gujarat/Indien." (M.A.) Thesis, Institut für Ethnologie, Freie Universität Berlin, 1998.

<sup>30</sup>Implicit in Chandubhai's claim is that *hijras* are ineffective. This contradicts the common dread that if hijras are treated badly they might take revenge by hindering one's fertility (castration) or stealing one's newborn child to make it into a eunuch. The *hijra* position of liminality, of being in-between, enables them to function in the role of ritual specialists.

<sup>31</sup>Wendy O'Flaherty (1973) Joseph Alter (1992, 1997).

ritually ameliorated by cooling the cut with water (“wound is sprinkled with water”), taming the victim with words, wrenching away the violent act in the sacrifice by insisting that killing was no killing. And finally, the sacrificer is secured from reciprocal violence (revenge) by deploying the magic technology of *ahimsayai*, a pre-ethical form of the later *ahimsa* (non-violence). Early Buddhist and Jain texts indicate that the monks were allowed to eat meat, but only if the meat was not contaminated with the effects of a reciprocal violence by having been killed exactly *for* the monk. Lord Mahavir, an important Jain saint, himself is said to have eaten meat before a great magical battle against a powerful opponent (Alsdorf 1962).

In the actual world, however, these roles are not unified into one as in the case of the renouncer. Instead, there is a division of labor and a complementarity of roles and functions. What Chandubhai expresses here are the imperatives of complementarity between Brahmin and Kshatriya, coolness and heat, warrior and priest (Brahman), and indirectly through his use of the term *hijra*, man and woman. It is impossible to inhabit both at the same time. As Harold Tambs-Lyche (1992) had demonstrated for Saurashtra, in contradistinction to the Dumontian dichotomy of Brahmin and King, complementarity in Saurashtra can be traced historically to the relation of the merchant to the King, the VaNiya to the Rajput and the respective regimes of value. These values culminate in what he calls “Vaniya model of culture,” which includes vegetarianism (*ahimsa*), asceticism, and a busyness ethic; and the “Darbar model of culture,” which includes chivalry, honor, purdah, and animal blood sacrifices in the context of *shakta* worship of the Goddess.

Since the nineteenth century the urban Vaniya culture has become dominant in central Gujarat. Even in Saurashtra, famous for its martial traditions, the animal sacrifices were held some times in the pre-war period (Tambs-Lyche 1992:98). Mahatma Gandhi’s international popularity, building without ambivalence on Vaniya

values, also contributed to this trend towards abolishing animal sacrifice and making vegetarianism hegemonic. In Ahmedabad, one well-to-do Rajput family told me that at the time of their grandfather the family had been “converted” to vegetarianism at the very hand of the Mahatma himself. The grandfather was part of Satyagraha agitation (they did not remember which one!). A large image of him adorned the entry to their house, as in many Darbar houses, and every day they performed a small *arti* (fire worship ritual) to it. Before independence, the grandfather followed Gandhiji’s call, but after his death the family returned to older practices and offered one goat a year to their Mataji, a Goddess. To this day, they make this offering in complete secrecy from neighboring eyes. One entire hall of their spacious house is dedicated as a shrine to the Goddess, whose call they were not able to ignore any longer.

In Bharat, this complementarity has finally collapsed, leaving him with nothing but pure disgust and in a relation to the other as a *chalenj* to him. This relation to the world is a trembling of the subject before it. When Bharat falls into the condition of *allagi*, he not only rejects the ingestion of meat but also the very sight of it. To merely see meat, as Bharat relates in his story about seeing chicken, seems to penetrate deep into his subject. Indeed, it is similar to the gaze of the eyes, as if the meat sees him in turn. There are many vegetarians in India, and especially in Gujarat, but not all of them have an *allagi* and fall sick when exposed to the sight of raw flesh or roasted meat. But for Bharat there is something still alive in the meat that takes cognizance of him, as if a pile of flesh was a non-anthropomorphic divinity with eyes painted orange or red. Bharat’s sensitivity marks him as a very special Jadav, and is a more radical version of mere “hesitations.”

Caught between a confluence of historical conjunctures, Bharat is arrested by contradictory impulses: the desire to ingest meat (it suddenly appears on his plate), and the visceral disgust for rotten flesh, the substance of a being that was killed

unnaturally for food and whose violated spirit witnesses its own consumption (compare the “Autobiography of a Goat” chapter eight). Ingesting the meat risks the undoing of all that he has been so laboriously externalizing (vomiting): his backwardness (*bekwad*), inferiority (*halku*), lowness (*nich*); his cultivated “hesitations” towards an enticing world through fasting (*upvaas*), abstaining from *dushaaNo* (vices); and finally his claim to represent the “essence of Hindu” (*hindu-tva*). At the same time, however, he claims proudly to be a Rajput, a man fit to rule. The Mother Goddess calls for a blood sacrifice from a King (Rajput), who fears no death and if he can’t provide death for her, she might want to take him instead (substitution).

Thus arrested, Bharat can neither withstand the meat’s *Anspruch*-- claim, challenge, address--in the form of it’s very sight, nor can he assimilate and thus overcome it, that is, simply eat or ignore it. The meat’s gaze literally eats him in turn. It has power over him instead of he over it. Pratab or Mr. Gowdi may also see meat, but they are not seen by it. For them meat is just an object which can be assimilated. And if the object is not to be ingested, they simply abstain and move on to the next. Meat has no power over them.

Bharat is taken by what I call the “malady of *allagi*,” a weakness that takes the form of a strong disgust not deriving from the object itself but from the subject’s internal trembling. The subject’s relation to something within himself is a trembling of the subject that distinguishes *allagi* from mere vegetarianism, a very common dietary “hesitation” in Gujarat with a long and complex political-cultural trajectory (Tambs-Lyche 1992). *Allagi* is a condition that reveals a fundamental ambivalence by making into the reason for one’s own weakness that which only oneself is responsible for: the desire to ingest the forbidden.

Meat signifies power, which Bharat desires, which he wants so much that any open disputation of his status as a true *kshatriya* is an inimical challenge. There is also something that Bharat needs to expulse; there is something that he wants to get rid of. It is the fact that he himself represents what he wants to vomit. It is when the meat looks back at him that something in him realizes that he is “that:” the other side of power, that is, powerlessness, inferiority, and disgust. Bharat’s is disgusted by what he himself is identified with. This fact holds true whether one accepts his claim to nobility as a Rajput (*kshatriya*), or whether one denies it, and considers him but a lowly, rough peasant (*shudra*), as do many of his superiors. In either case, meat consumption is clearly implied.<sup>32</sup>

Bharat wants the power that meat signifies by abstaining from eating that very meat. He wants to have the access to the symbolic means of production of violence (power) through an ascetic technique that is the core of non-violence (*ahimsa*), which implies abstention from meat (vegetarianism). That meat, however, is the very source of power (violence) that is historically associated with him.

It is in this enigmatic arrest, neither being able to go forward nor to turn around, that he is caught, collapses in the sight of meat, and vomits. Thus he has to retrace the steps backward as if to undo the entire encounter (by reversing it). Retracing his steps is neither turning around, nor going forward. It is the attempt to undo the aporia that he suddenly found himself in. The malady of *allagi* is an example of being caught in the middle of something, in a veritable confluence of impulses, which are no longer neatly separate in a symbolic division of values and roles that are complementary to each other. In Bharat this complementarity has broken down.

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<sup>32</sup>His caste status is precarious and many a Gujarati would doubt him to be a Rajput at all. In fact, many have expressed this doubt to me openly, albeit prudently, not in his presence. I was also asked many times why I would spend time with someone “like this” at all. It has to be understood that this doubt is very painful, because it means not much is ever going to be expected of him, who is so concerned about what people think and expect.

In the end, however, and quite ironically, it is the very malady of *allagi*, which allows Bharat to reinvent himself as someone new in the context of Hindutva, because his disgust allows for the most formidable of visceral reactions against those that have to be opposed: Muslims. Disgust becomes a weapon for establishing a new relation to the Muslim because it needs no argument, no conviction. It is purely visceral. His disgust speaks: “I want none of what *you* eat.” While “you” is without doubt the immediate Muslim meat shops surrounding him in Patri Sheli, I hope to have convincingly shown, that this “you” also included the rival Jhalas, a Rajput clan whose claim to status is much more secure than the Jadav’s, and finally the former Muslim nobility at his home village of which his grandfather used to bow as a subject, and now speaks nostalgically and favorably about.<sup>33</sup> Hindutva allows for Bharat’s weakness of disgust, his *allagi*, to become a formidable power, a disgusting affection, signifying a “true Hindu.”

#### 4.2.3 The blue folder

Bharat is the first member of his village who acquired an academic degree. In fact, he has three degrees, all kept neatly inside a thick blue plastic folder that I bought for him in 2000, the year there was serious flooding in Ahmedabad. Bharat gets nervous when someone fingers them. In India the loss of any bureaucratic document can be a nightmare. Registrars both at schools and university offices are more often than not incomplete or poorly organized. If you lose a document, it is easier to bribe an officer to “forge” a new one than to get it legitimately replaced.

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<sup>33</sup> Kristeva (1982:2) is helpful here when she describes her own nausea at encountering the skin on the surface of milk, the child trying to emancipate herself from her parents through loathing of food items: “‘I’ want none of that element, sign of their desire, (...). Since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.” And a little further she describes, “(...) it is thus that *they* see that ‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death.”



Living in the chaos of a university hostel with other students, you can easily lose your documents to the three elements, water, sun, and caste brethren (*bhaibandh*). The water collects on your dorm's floor during a good monsoon year. Being a farmer, Bharat appreciates the *varsaad* (rain), thinking of the parched fields and throats of his relatives in the village. But in the city, his dorm gets flooded yearly, and there are no cupboards or desks provided to keep things above water. If it isn't the water that threatens documents, then it is the ever-encroaching fungus from humidity that eats away on the cheap paper of documents, as well as on the walls, bricks, and windowpanes. Additionally, if left in the unforgiving sun, the print is quickly bleached away until the documents are barely readable. Last but not least, Bharat's relatives have at times asked to borrow his precious documents in order to clear up some bureaucratic matter, and he always fears they will not return them.

He shows me his Bachelor of Arts in Gujarati, Masters of Arts in Principal Gujarati and Linguistics Subordinairy (sic!), and Bachelor of Education in Gujarati and Social Studies. He also has certificates for being the captain in volleyball and cricket at Bhasha Bhavan (linguistics department) and AG Teacher's College. Everywhere signatures in the English language coupled with Gujarati. The certificates for sport are all in Gujarati except for the one of Bhasha Bhavan. Always his surname indicating his caste precedes his first name. It reads, "Jadav Bharat is awarded this certificate of merit in recognition of his proficiency in Cricket. 1997." All the academically important certificates are in English, meaning Bharat cannot read them.

The certificates look similar to those distributed in Germany, another country obsessed with bureaucratic magic of the paper kind. Through script style, paper type, and the use of large words, a certain air of gravity is supposed to be produced which relates rather obliquely to the actual accomplishment of the "degree" and the promise of recognition it fulfills. There is an inherent insincerity in the certificates, which

escapes Bharat. He is very proud of this blue folder, the collection of his achievements in Ahmedabad. It seems as if the less he understands what they precisely say, the more he values them. In the front of his blue folder, he has written an index, in his most handsome Gujarati script, enumerating chronologically all documents that follow. The index is written with a special, fancy pen lent to him for the occasion by Bipinbhai, his wealthy Patel acquaintance. Amongst his caste affiliates and student colleagues, Bharat impresses upon them that Bipinbhai is someone he knows in the city.

Once Bharat took his blue folder home to his home village and showed it around. I noticed that he was visibly uncomfortable as he watched the rough farmer hands of his neighbors and kin, and especially his mother's white hands full of *chapatti* flower, finger the pages. All inspected seriously the indecipherable pieces of white paper representing the successful certification of Bharat's life in the city.

#### 4.2.4 *Personaliti and entri* under the gaze of the Goddess

I seldom see Bharat read a book, and despite his superficial knowledge of Gujarati poets and writers, he is usually quite uninterested in anything having to do with literature, poetry, or even linguistics. Bharat shows no pleasure in discussing with me classic authors like Mirabhai, Narsi Mehta, Premanand, or a more modern one, Narmadshankar, and he certainly does not agree with what some of the more modern writers stand for. If his interest in Gujarati literature is somewhat dim, his interest in any other language is completely absent. Although I spent much time living side by side with Bharat, I have oddly enough never learned anything about the subjects, including Gujarati that he so assiduously studied over the many years of our friendship.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>This is the reason that Bharat's interest in scriptures is minimal. He delegates all such matters to his Brahmin teachers, or to religious specialists. Initially, he dislikes the fact that I ask him questions about why people behave as they do, and he is uncomfortable that I take his explanations seriously. He

What does get him worked up, though, is the way I treat books in my room at home, as they lay all around on the floor in the absence of a desk. He would frequently complain bitterly about my misuse. When I finally purchase a desk, he complains how the books are strewn all over the table, instead of being neatly staked one by one next to each other. For Bharat my behavior is *pagal* (crazy). Once I made a pile of my large dictionaries and used them as a ladder, stepping barefooted on them to re-attach my mosquito net to a nail in the wall. It was after suffering a serious bout of malaria. Seeing this, Bharat got very angry and shouted at me--the only time I can remember of this happening. He fumed, “Books are extensions of Saraswati, the Goddess of learning. You can’t step on them, not even as much as touch them with your feet.”

In the ensuing discussion Bharat explained, there is a danger in such a disrespectful treatment of books. If you do not show respect, you will be severely punished. You will, for example, not be able to learn. He says, “Nothing will enter into the head.” After this incident, I decide never again to make him anxious about learning, and on the following weekend we ventured together to Mirzapur market in the old city to buy some bookshelves and chairs. It strikes me as curious that whatever I do, he who reads so little always reminds me of the fact that I treat books the wrong way.

But even if Bharat is not a great reader, during my initial language studies and his early college years, he enjoyed performing presentations of wise sayings and reciting poems with spiritual value at home in preparation for class. With great concentration, he practiced in front of the mirror for hours, memorizing the finest details of gesture, rhythm, and tone. I became his audience, and got the impression

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initially felt that his answers were not appropriate, that he did not know enough and did not deserve the attention I gave him. Through time, however, he started to enjoy the attention I reserved for his opinions. In the tape recording I have made of many of our conversations, his voice obtains more and more authority over time.

that what he enjoyed was less the content of the spoken word than the recitation and performance itself: standing in front of an attentive audience wearing a clean, freshly pressed white shirt, a golden chain watch, new spit-polished black leather shoes, oiled, neatly parted hair, and trimmed moustache. Alternately, he would put on his cream-colored fancy *kurta* (the long Indian dress for men), exchange the black shoes for clean sandals and the watch for a pious red cloth wristband indicating a visit to a spiritual leader or temple, and wear a clean orange or red *tilak* (auspicious sign) from the local Hanuman temple in the very center of his forehead.

As different as both dressing styles seem at first, the former sophisticated and modern the latter pious and traditional, for Bharat their commonality is greater than their differences. Both dressing styles produce what he refers to as “*personaliti*” and “*entri*,” taken from the English “personality” and “entry.” *Personaliti* and *entri* are perhaps two most highly valued qualities mentioned in talk of a young generation of residents in Ahmedabad.

When Bharat catches someone’s eye, looking at someone who catches one’s gaze (in real life or in a movie) the terms *personaliti* and *entri* are usually used as adjectives. They can be displayed through an expensive pen in one’s shirt pocket or a fancy motorbike.<sup>35</sup> Above all, both are public qualities that are seen by eyes.

The phonetic origin of and similarity to the English terms is misleading, as the local nuances in vernacular use reference shadow meanings. Their semantic complexity emerges as Anglified terms embedded in Gujarati utterances. Both words shadow terms like *vyaktitva* (personality, individuality, lit. the essence of the person, or better, the essence of manifestation) and *olakh* (acquaintance, surname; sign, mark, or token of recognition).

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<sup>35</sup>The precise distinction between *entri* and *personaliti* escapes me. Most students at Gujarat University wear pants shirt, and it is amusing how most indeed make sure to have a fancy pen showing in their shirt pocket. Bharat even puts the pen in his shirt when sitting on a tractor in his home village. All of them try to drive with motorbikes as often as they can even if they do not own one themselves.

The verb *olakh karaavavi*, which denotes “to introduce,” is related to the verb *olakhaavavu* (to mention the marks by which a thing may be recognized) and *olakhaan*, which means acquaintance, familiarity, recognition, as well as mark of recognition. The Sanskrit root *vyank* meaning “to reveal,” becomes *vyakt*, a Gujarati adjective for manifested, displayed, open, and visible (matter in its manifest form). It can also connote expressed, evident, revealed.<sup>36</sup> It culminates in the Gujarati term *vyakti* meaning person, individual, as well as manifestation.

This Sanskrit source of *vyakti* contrasts with the English and German genealogy of the Latin *personae*. Despite the fact that the meaning of “mask” for person in Latin has not in actuality come down to English, “personality” can mean a public person like the *persona* (a character in a play) defined by the social roles to which one is responsive to and interpellated by (Mauss 1978:240). The German word *Persönlichkeit* adds to the above meaning an individual not necessarily widely known but of high esteem, of qualification, deserving some form of special recognition, in the sense of the English “expert,” as in “*eine Persönlichkeit auf wissenschaftlichem Gebiet.*”

As in English, however, the German term can also indicate an abstract inner quality or state, and “*persönlich*,” astonishing as it may seem at first, means simply “private,” as does the English “personal,” that is, adhering to the person within his or her own sphere. In sum, in English and in German “privateness” is expressed through a noun making usage of the Latin “person,” which expresses in *personae* more the social and public concept of the person.

If semantics would follow logic, the German *Persönlichkeit* should also mean “privateness,” because private matters are “*persönliche Geschäfte.*” Equally in English, the “personal” has little in common with one’s “public personality,” and in

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. GED and TMGED.

fact an entire yellow press magazine industry is busy trying to show us the amazing discrepancies between the two. Most importantly however, there is permanence in the concept of personality. It is not something that is understood to be manipulatable at any given moment.

Bharat's *personaliti* and *entri*, however, is about appearances in first encounters, the essence of a person (*vyaktitva*) that expresses itself in that encounter through a token of recognition (*olakh*). It is supposed to cancel out what his name and appearance does in the first place, permanent qualities linked to caste and class. He tries to get rid of “*bekwad*” and does not want to be confused with “*halka loko*.” He tries to take control of the identification he is in danger of being subjected to. The point is that the techniques to produce *personaliti* and *entri* can be learned, managed, and manipulated. They are supplemental devices, which seem to allow for manipulation of what Bharat is in constant danger of signifying in the city: *bekwad* and *halku* (thin, low, inferior).

*Entri* and *personaliti* is about the power to create desire in the other's gaze, a desire hard to induce in a society where poverty, hierarchy and their repercussions (e.g. boundaries of *maryaadaa*) limit the available forms of recognition. There are too many people that seem alike (caste) and thus too much repetition of everything and everyone. This desire to stand out and be gazed at is the reversal of the traditional threat of being looked at desirously, the fear of *najar* (the effect of the evil eye).<sup>37</sup> Both belong to the same phenomena. The gaze is powerful, and carries potency, there feared, here desired --be it in *entri* or *najar*-- and has lost none of its potency. Bharat is not scared of jealous looks. In fact, he desires the jealousy of the others a little. He desires to be the recipient of that gaze, that glimpse of a moment that he himself times and again emits to others.

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<sup>37</sup>The term *najar* denotes “seeing” but also “glimpse, glance, and the effect of evil eye” (GED).

Bharat often borrows a belt of mine that he likes to wear. He says it produces “*entri*,” using the term as a modifier, or an effect of an initial impression one makes. For Bharat, objects such as a nice shirt, a belt, fine shoes, or a fancy wristwatch, can create “*entri*,” that is, the power of catching other people’s gazes. When I asked Bharat to think of other examples of “*entri*” he turned to Bollywood movies, where in the first few seconds the main hero or heroine enters the stage and is introduced to the audience with a musical aperture. In cinema screenings, audiences frequently welcome this introduction with a sigh of pleasure, a call, or some sound of recognition. That, literally, is a stage entry. The power exhibited in that cinematographic stage entry is similar to what Bharat desires, to a lesser degree, when he tries to produce *entri*.<sup>38</sup>

Initial impressions in first encounters are vital in many settings: upon entering the classroom, in introductions to important persons (*olkhan*) like teachers and professors, or in marriage. They are important because impressions endure long after the initial encounter. In fact, when I met Bharat for the first time in 1999, he was awaiting me at the door of my room, well groomed and dressed, with a red rose flower in his hand that he ceremoniously handed over to me after bowing devotionally. The flower was actually from his Guru, Professor Vyas, and explicitly for me. The incredible sight of Bharat and the red rose flower endures as an impression even as I write this.

Several years later, I was asked to write a laudation for a publication celebrating Professor Vyas’s retirement. I was specifically asked to describe how I

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<sup>38</sup>Within the same movie there can be diverse entry-scenes, when for example heroes and heroines reenter the screen in new clothes and with new gadgets, creating the power of *entri*. In Bollywood movies, the screen entrance and departure of actors is of aesthetic importance. I cannot but compare it to Vaishnava worship in which love and care for the deity takes the form of an elaborate *puja*, in which the anthropomorphic image is undressed, bathed, and then dressed and adorned again with clothes and jewelry all to the very pleasure of the devotees. It is a widely known fact, regarded with amused detachment, that superstars like Amitabh Bachhan, Shah Rukh Khan, or Ashwarya Rai, are divinized in their own right through temples and shrines.

had met this locally renowned scholar. Initially, I thought I was asked to describe when we actually met in person. But I came to understand that the request was for me to narrate my initial encounter with Bharat, one of his most loyal students, and how the red rose was presented to me. I was told to describe in great detail the gestures and tone of this initial encounter, a scene that was not spontaneous but already elaborately scripted. I was asked not to share *my* memory, but to share what professor Vyas intended me to remember as he, in the first place, had crafted this memory himself.<sup>39</sup>

The idea of “*entri*” is a first encounter whose importance is also manifest in the initial meetings of marriage parties. After, sometimes lengthy, deliberations between prospective in-laws (or proxy authorities) to arrange a marriage, the prospective marriage partners meet for the first time. Today, many people say that this initial meeting of possible spouses amidst thirds, usually lasting only half an hour, is less important than in the past. It is my impression that this type of *entri* has become even more important in recent years. For Bharat and his siblings, the prospective partners are allowed to address each other and ask questions. Practically this means that men ask most of the questions to their prospective brides, who just nod yes or no shyly. In these formal settings, gazes and gestures, clothing and appearances become more important than what is said. Afterward these encounters, the involved families talk endlessly about what they have seen, attempting to decode and interpret the qualities of the prospective spouses.

After these meetings alternative evaluations and judgments are circulated, which then become reasons for rejection or approval. Most popular is the perception of someone’s “nature” (*bhavna*), a category in and of itself with a wide range semantic content, which is made to fit adjectives connected to any aspect of the given person. This talk can take extreme forms, where insignificant aspects of the prospective

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<sup>39</sup>My account is published in Gandhi and Vyas, ed. (2002).



partners, like clothing, hair, or a gaze, is interpreted over-determinedly to fit key descriptive terms, that are then used like precision knives by a woodcarver, carving out compromises and dissecting decisions.

As we shall see later (in chapter seven), these impressions are neither forgotten nor kept discretely secret. If the marriage turns out ugly, all of what was seen will re-emerge and find a voice, which will then speak: “I told you, she is like this or that,” or “I told you it was obvious these people are this or that” (with “these people” is meant the affinal relations). In conflicts relatives will reiterate what was initially perceived, apportioning blame and making sense of the failure of marital bliss to emerge from their recommendations with reference to what they can remember as first impression.

The idea of the impressive first encounter, the moment of a mutual gaze, of course also carries a relation to one of the most significant acts of religious worship in India, the *darshan*. The term *darshan*, (the Gujarati *darsha* meaning sight, view, appearance, cf. TMGED), is popularly used in the way we might say “pay a visit” in English. People will say, “I am going for *darshan*,” (*darshan karva jaau chhu*) to indicate they are visiting the neighborhood temple.

One offers *darshan* to a Guru, a God, or a political authority, but one also takes their *darshan*, that is, their blessing by being seen by them. In Hindi the verbs *darshan dena* (to give *darshan*) and *darshan lena* (to take *darshan*) express the mutuality of the exchange. “The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one’s own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity” (Eck 1996: 6, 3).

As Eck has also pointed out, however, seeing is not an act initiated by the worshipper but rather the deity presents itself in its image to be seen by the devotees. This mutual exchange in no way expresses equality between devotee and deity, but following the logic of the Indian gift, it is an asymmetric exchange underwriting

existing hierarchies (Parry 1986). The hierarchy notwithstanding, the exchange expresses intimacy, because “seeing” is a sort of “touching” (Kramrisch and Gonda in Eck 1996:9). To see and be seen by the deity is a form of touching the deity, that is, a closeness that does not imply equality, it is an intimacy framed in hierarchy.

Indeed, in Gujarat many sacred images are made with seeing unblinking eyes, that can only be averted by a curtain, a piece of cloth which is often put over the deity, or by averting one’s eyes. Even in rural temples and shrines the most non-anthropomorphic images--what looks like a pile of sand, a flat wall, or a mere stone--are displaying eyes in order to fix one’s gaze upon it and to be perceived by the divinity in return (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). In Shiva temples, the God’s *lingam* in the center of the *yoni* often will carry “eyes” or “dots,” whereupon one can fix one’s gaze when one “takes darshan” (*darshan le chhe*), one sees and is being seen.



Figure 6. Sri Bhatiji. Three divinities in a rural shrine near Dhrangadhra, Surendranagar District, Saurashtra, Gujarat

*Darshan*, seeing and being seen by the idol or the Guru, is itself a sort of repetitive first encounter. In local belief the divinities are not identical to the image, but they take appearances *in* them, complicating the Christian distinction between image, icon, and idol. This worship mode is an integral part of a habitus, a way of being, which takes seriously what you can see, and in which seeing means knowing in the sense of having an insight (cf. Gonda in Eck 1996: 9-10). The philosophical schools in the Veda are, accordingly, called *darshana*. They take seriously the idea that there can be temporary manifestations of something in something else, or in somebody that catches the eye in a glimpse, in a moment of truth. But even more importantly, there is weight given to the fact of being seen.



Figure 7. Form of Hanuman in Ahmedabad

Hindu Gods never close their eyes, meaning that in order to avert their gaze, temple doors are shut regularly or curtains are drawn over or in front of them. But on the closed door of a temple, or a wall next to it, the unblinking eyes often reappears. In Gujarat one encounters eyes not only on religious icons and images, but painted on walls, vehicles (especially trucks and rickshaws) (see Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10), books, stitched on cloth carry bags, or other seemingly profane contexts. Eyes are part of a very ubiquitous popular iconography. Whenever I inquired about who is watching, I received but two answers. Either I was told that these ubiquitous eyes were nothing short of a God, just decoration not religion, or that these are the eyes of the *matangi* (Mother Goddess) herself, the one who is everywhere.



Figure 8. Transport rickshaw in Ahmedabad

I have to admit to an ambivalent reaction to these inescapable eyes. On the one hand they are beautifully and vibrantly colorful, the eyes are framed tender lashes



and well-drawn eyebrows, giving each a unique expression. I enjoy looking at them, an exotic escape from the experience of dusty urban Gujarat. On the other hand, despite all aesthetic pleasure, I could never rid myself of the association of those ubiquitous eyes with Orwell's "Big Brother is watching you." Orwell's "1984" was one of the popular books of my youth growing up in walled Berlin, where the panoptical experience was particularly compelling given the *Staatssicherheit* in the East and the claustrophobic atmosphere in the West.



Figure 9. Truck on the outskirts of Ahmedabad

To be sure, the eyes of the state and the eyes of God are of a very different kind. But in Gujarat the ubiquitous eyes of Gods and Goddesses seem to represent the ever-open eyes of a society interested to look and gaze at all times at all things. One is gazed at relentlessly by bystanders, people on the street, from windows, or vehicles, at street corners or dead ends. The standing and gazing without facial movement or expression remains, to my mind, one of the most powerful urban experience in

Ahmedabad, fundamentally different to the anonymity and disinterest in the stranger in urban U.S. or Germany.



Figure 10. The ubiquity of eyes in Ahmedabad's city scape

In this sense, despite Ahmedabad being a city of seven million people, it never felt like a metropolis due to constant panoptical gaze that watches over one's movements and especially over women's movements. Space, in its neighborhood, *mohallas*, street corners, and many public establishments, is highly structured by the gazes that many a local resident tries to escape from. Lovers hide behind vehicles, women behind veils and shawls, and men and women behind sunglasses. The purpose of hiding behind these objects is not to make people invisible. Rather, the rationale is to prevent one's eyes from meeting someone else's eyes. By contrast, Bharat tries to attract as many eyes as possible.

For example, many young women veil themselves with scarves when traveling on their scooters, as if they were Muslim women. Initially I am always told that the veiling is a defense against the heat and the dust of the city. But finally I am also told that meeting young men's gazes is dangerous--as men often feel addressed--and consequently emboldened to attempt "contact" if they manage to cross eyes with a woman's gaze. It is often treated as an invitation to flirt, and hard for a woman to terminate because men do not take rejection very well. Thus many women choose to remain "unseen," or better, "un-gazed" at, or unable to gaze at. Eyes can "touch" you, thus they control gender-structured public space. Especially the male gaze structures space in Ahmedabad.

These veiled women also become products of fantasy, of love and illicit sex. To be veiled means you have something to hide. Thus a University guard for example tells me that all these veiled female students meet with their boyfriends and thus need to hide their identities. Vice versa, however, for people like Ranjit and Bharat, women that do not hide behind cloth and are beautiful or made-up with care (those whose eyes you can meet, that is, who you can "touch") are possibly prostitutes. Seeing prostitutes, where there are none, is a common pastime for many young male Ahmedabadis who see what they merely imagine is there. This is a similar phenomenon to the *pishaacho* of chapter three, the invisible women, which were supposedly there and then gone although no one ever saw them.

Seeing and being seen in the street in Ahmedabad can be a disturbing experience, as people's eyes follow you unabashedly. I ask many Gujaratis about this. Most answer that those who stare try to figure out, who you are: what caste, what class, what country? I am told that the less they can recognize the more they look at you, the more they are confused the more they gaze. Not to recognize thus means to go on looking. They try to be in touch with that which you do not understand (like

*darshan*, gazing at the divine). Isn't it the opposite in a Western urban setting where the more you recognize the more you look, and the more sure you are that you do not recognize, the less you dare to intrude through gazes?

I am not the only one who was at times uncomfortable with the ubiquitous religious iconography of unblinking eyes. The most stunning experience occurred with my friend Zakir, from the Muslim Mansuri caste, a cloth merchant of the picturesque Dagarbad *bazaar* of Ahmedabad. Zakir is a warm but rather shy middle-aged man, eager to meet foreigners and strangers in the city with whom he can escape his marriage, which had gone awry.

We met initially on the street, as he was walking with his son in Muslim Shahpur, where he lives in a small, overcrowded house with his wife, father, and brothers inclusive of in-laws. I asked him for the best tea around. Zakir could not to be overlooked. His facial hair had the color of dark orange, and he wore a proud slightly blueish Pathani-style *kurta*. As long as I knew Zakir, he was never tired of dying his hair and beard in the deepest possible of oranges and reds. Zakir was thus identifying himself clearly as a Muslim for all to see because such dyed beards without fail connote Muslims in the city. He did this at a time when even my former Brahman language teacher shaved off his beard completely and replaced it with a short moustache simply in order not to be called a Muslim in the all-Hindu middle-class Vastapur district.

Once I invited Zakir to come to my apartment for tea. At the time I was living alone and my apartment was located in a Muslim society house in Shah Alam, deep in South-East Ahmedabad. I had made it a habit to meet with Zakir and discuss his notions of Islam and Hinduism, his experiences during the pogroms, and his family life. We were drinking tea and discussing something when Zakir suddenly appeared uncomfortable. He looked around, annoyed by something. Putting his tea on the floor



on which we were sitting, he silently stood up, walked without comment to my desk and then to the cupboards, turning around every single book cover depicting Hindu Gods and Goddesses, including a Gujarati children's comic book of the Mahabharata, which I had just bought a day before. Then he walked to the open door of my bedroom on which hung a *kutchhi* handicraft bag onto which was stitched a pair of Mother Goddess eyes. He even insisted to cover a small Gujarati *bhajan* songbook dedicated to Mata Amabaji, who was also depicted on the cover. Zakir proceeded with care but firmly.

In urban Gujarat the religious iconography of eyes quite unmistakably connotes "Hindu." Thus I first interpreted this as a spontaneous and rather astonishing act of defiance by a Muslim a few months after the experience of being collectively punished in the pogroms. But he revealed in our following discussions that the reason for his enigmatic behavior was not defiance, but a genuine and rather unselfconscious uneasiness at being exposed to all these gazes. In view of so many gazes of Hindu divinities, he simply felt exposed and did not want to go on talking to me. He could not explain why they were bothering him, and I did not want to push my questions too far.

Never before had I realized that Zakir, who always liked to represent himself to me as a staunch Muslim, was actually *seen* by Hindu Gods. He regularly translated Urdu articles from Pakistani newspapers for himself as well as for me, and, as if in exchange, I come with him to *namaz* (salat, Islamic communal prayer). As Eck points out, the eyes of Hindu Gods never blink; they see you without interruption. Only a curtain can protect you. When he so carefully but firmly covered every depiction of every God, every pair of divine eyes in my apartment, it was to prevent these divinities from perceiving him, or us. Although he claims not to have been in a Hindu temple

for a long time, Zakir acted like a pujari in a temple who draws the curtain close at the beginning and after the *arti*.

In the daily *arti* ritual during sundown in temples, the God's presence is indicated with the loud bell sounds with which the Gods are woken up. With the bells and noises the Gods are made present to the gaze of their followers. More significantly, however, many temples have closed doors or curtains to protect the idols. The opening and closing of these curtains and doors is a significant act in the temple performed by the pujari. Often a curtain or door is closed at the beginning, and then opened again during the *arti* ritual itself, to reveal (again) the eyes of the Gods: now in their full presence and not only empty form. It is in this moment when most temple visitors will bow towards the Gods. Curtains and doors are not used in every temple in this way, however.

I was astonished about Zakir because I thought him rather secure in his carefully cultivated Islamic austerity. Zakir was not able simply to ignore the images, even though he always insisted that all these Hindu beliefs are *bakwaas* (nonsense) and *saach nathi* (not real, hocuspocus). Perhaps precisely because he dismissed belief in Hindu Gods, he was being seen by them, thus was interpellated by them more than he was willing or able to acknowledge. To fear the gaze of staring Gods is a form of acknowledgment of their existence.

Zakir always claimed that Hinduism was nothing but a bunch of false "*stori*", an agglomeration of invented fantasies. He never felt silly, however, despite aspiring to a certain orthodoxy, in telling me about magical stories of local Muslim Pir and the Prophet (*begamber*), although at times he doubted them too. And he had criticized me repeatedly for wasting my time with these "Hindu stories." It was unnecessary for me to learn about their Gods and Goddesses and to visit their temples. Initially, he thought, I believed in these "stories". Once he realized that I had a certain distance

from them, he nonetheless seemed puzzled when I told him that I enjoyed the experience of Hindu traditions.

Zakir, as much as he always disavowed Hindu beliefs, felt uncomfortable under the gazes of gods. He protected himself from them almost unselfconsciously. In comparison, Salimbhai, the poor Muslim *chokidaar* (house guard) of my apartment building, had no problem with Hindu images or even with exclaiming “*Jay Mataji*.” Although Salim would never find it necessary (or proper, for that matter) to deny the existence of Hindu Gods or the Mataji, these deities had no power over him. He never felt anxious under their gazes when he drank tea in my apartment, despite the fact that he visited a mosque several times a day and considered himself a true “*pakka Muslim*.”

The unblinking eyes are the eyes of a God. Zakir can’t avert his eyes. He is observed by entities even in the absence of his belief in them. They can’t see Salim, who never tries to deny their existence, but they *do* see Zakir, who would never admit to their existence. Such is the strange state of the religious life in Gujarat!

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Bharat’s concern for “*entri*” and “*personaliti*,” then, is not merely superficial concern or vanity, but of much more existential significance for him, as he understands the social importance of manipulating how he is seen. In his attention to appearance, he is not trying to inhabit a deity or distribute his blessing to devotees, but he is giving weight to the visual and the first impression, which is so central to social life in Gujarat.

I always enjoyed watching Bharat in front of the mirror, prepping for his “*personaliti*” and “*entri*.” I saw in him something of my own father, who also always insisted, because he was merely an *Ausländer* in Germany, that he had to make up for this marginality by maximizing his looks in order to try to be the best dressed man

around. There is an almost ritual quality to choices regarding appearance, when each day Bharat earnestly replays the questions: which of the two pants he possesses should be worn, how carefully to iron them, how does he looks to me. When he looks pleased with himself, his smile turns somewhat smug, and he gains demonstrably in real self-confidence. His attentiveness expresses an obsession with that which can be manipulated in the face of too much which precisely cannot, like his surname, caste, village education, academic skills, and his social universe of caste brethren.

Over the years Bharat often complained to me bitterly about my own dressing style, especially when he took me to meet his friends, caste brethren, and even in his home village. Bharat is concerned about how I am seen, because it has an effect on the way he is being seen associating with me. He would have gotten along well with my father's generation, but post-war and especially post-70's Berliners, when I was growing up, were conspicuously sloppy. He complains of my wearing worn-out *khaadi kurta* from the Government Handloom House on Ashram Road, which make me look like an odd old Gandhian, or that I always wear open-toe sandals and never bother to wear closed shoes, and if I do occasionally bother, they are never polished, and only once did he see me sport a closely trimmed moustache. Daily, I appear to him as a Muslim-looking man, with three-day-old stubble. He cannot fathom why I insist on carrying a silly ratty backpack everywhere I go.

I believe he will always be astonished at how little exterior support I need to get people's attention. Merely because of the magical fact that I am "Western," I seem to need to invest so much less time and labor adorning myself than he does.

#### 4.2.5 Personality and the art of Saying "no"

There is another space where "*personaliti*" is writ large. Throughout Ahmedabad private English language schools have metamorphosed into what are called "Personality Schools." These private schools advertise in colorful posters

around colleges and universities and are popular among ambitious youths (see Figure 11). The office of the “Oxford Academy of English Speaking and Personality Development” is on Ashram road in a complex not far from the Natraj Cinema, next to an irresistible Indian book shop, in which countless books pour forth from cupboards like the black and grey bushy hair out of old men’s ears (see Figure 12).



Figure 11. English language and personality school

At the office, a young woman named Sonal tells me all about the course while AC’s and tube lights are making zooming noises above and around us. On the walls large posters depict commonly advertised migration destinations like New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. Universities and businesses in these same countries complete with cultural, academic, and historical guides, advertise regularly in the weekend sections of local newspapers. Each poster portrays large stadiums, halls, and public monuments.



Figure 12. Oxford Academy

Sonal is flirtatious, self-confident, and very pretty. She is proud of her good looks and, because I already know English well, she is willing to explain to me the “Personality Development Section.” I ask for a prospectus, and she corrects me, “a brochure,” indicating her own fluency in English. The section on personality development included in the course costs 4500 Rupees for several months and makes the learning of English appear almost secondary. The sections include, “How to be a Winner,” “Body Language,” “Etiquette and Manners,” “Interview Facing,” “Effective Self Introduction,” and “Powerful Public Speaking,” next to “Letter Application Writing,” “Grooming and Dressing Sense,” and “Keys to a more Powerful Personality.”

In the brochure, under the personality development section, the last item on the list reads, “The Art of Saying No.” I find that most peculiar and I ask Sonal about it. She smiles, rolls her eyes, and tells me, “Yeah, that is so very difficult...It is so much important.” Then she adds in a high staccato: “Suppose you are very successful. Suppose you have good job and many friends. You will be very popular. Suppose

these friends will try to be with you all the time. But then suppose they ask you for your bike. They ask you to borrow your motorbike for the day. What will you say? How do you know they will bring it back? To be successful you have to learn to be able to say “no.” You need it for work the next day. You have to come with your bike. You have to say ‘no.’”

As Sonal explains the art of saying “no,” I think of Bharat’s blue folder and his anxiety about lending his precious documents to caste brethren. The brochure finally asks the reader if s/he is one of those people who wish to settle abroad and have a “magnetic personality,” and if s/he wants to be, “an active participant of the Ultramodern New Millenium Society.” Bharat, blissfully unaware of the contents of this brochure, wants the “magnetic personality” but certainly does not want to be part of the “Ultramodern new Millenium society.” He draws his clues from other sources: movies, education, and marriage.

#### 4.2.6 Education

Bharat feels obliged to elaborate on his decision to become a teacher in Ahmedabad. He never regretted coming to the city, he says, although several of his teachers told me that his marks were rather weak, only seventy-percent, which is not at all convincing. Bharat knows he is not the brightest of students, not even amongst farmers or members of backward castes and classes. But he does not worry that his academic performance is not as good as it should be. More important to him is the foothold he has established with his professors, to whom he always displays the deepest of reverence. Professor Vyas, his Brahmin teacher and “Guru”, describes Bharat as “not bright, but loyal”—and he means it as a sincere compliment.

In my discussions with teaching staff of Gujarat University, they complain about the poor education of lower-caste and lower-class students who have received little or no academic preparation to enter the University. Offices in Gujarat University

are always open and students come and go to pay *darshan* to their professors. I am regularly surprised how openly the subject of academic performance is discussed.

In certain disciplines, like linguistics, the standards have dropped “catastrophically,” as one teacher put it bluntly in front of some of his own backward caste students. The lack of embarrassment or shyness is relayed also by the way in which professors introduce their students to me. Often the teacher will mention the student’s accomplishments, marks, grades, or percentage numbers, or lack thereof. A professor, for example, might speak say: “Parvez, let me introduce to you. This is Raju Makwana, BC from Rajkot. He is BA in AST, Gold Medalist in LDE of 1999, cricket captain in Gujarat College in 2000, but reached only a lowly 70% in the final 2001” (this is a made up example).

Their low estimation of contemporary students academic competence stands in direct contrast to the influence teachers have over their students life in questions of marriage and access to jobs, as well as the enthusiasm I witness of many young students (especially female) for their professors, who they truly venerate deeply and try to impress in everything they do. It is as if the student who performs so poorly compensates for it with devotion and loyalty.

When I ask Bharat what change education can bring about, he refers to those who are “*unchusthan*” (in high places)<sup>40</sup> and when I ask for an explanation of the word, he adds, “those who are *higher level upar*.” Bharat means VaNiyas, Brahmins, and Patel in the city. He elaborates that they have fewer children, more money, good jobs, as well as “*high level idea*,” by which he means more elevated thought, *vichaar* (reflection, idea, thought). In the end his decision to pursue “education” will lead to the advancement of his entire Jadav society (“*samaaj ni pragaati thai chhe*”). The ultimate result will not only be material gain or political power, but “*high level mind*

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<sup>40</sup>The term *unch* means high, superior, noble.



*ave chhe*” (high level mind will also come). There are too many nuisances (*dushaaNo*, vices) amongst the members of his “*samaaj*” (caste, community). That according to Bharat is one of the main reasons why he decided to take up and engage in this thing “education” (“*etla mate education lidhu chhe*”).<sup>41</sup>

Although he got a job as a “lecturer” at Ambedkar University, he is still going to pursue a PhD with a new academic guide recommended by Professor Vyas, his Guru and teacher. He has not yet begun to write anything but he has an elaborate title, which he recites slowly as if to give it added weight: “*Bhasha, Sahitya, Sanshodan Kshetre, K.K. Shastree nu pradaan*” (The Study of Language and Literature in the work of K.K. Shastree). K.K. Shastree is a *mantri* (leader, minister) of the Gujarat VHP, Bharat explains, and, he adds, he is a Brahmin. He has edited many books on previous ages (*sampaadak*, literally one who collects and assembles), has done their analysis (*enalysis vadhaare karyu chhe*), and has also “done linguistics” (*linguistics ma paN saru kam karyu chhe*). Having studied only through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade working hard all by himself, the renowned scholar became a professor, someone who gives advice to students (“*pote potani jate mahenat karine e agal agal chhe, profesar banya chhe, emNe ... award malio chhe...*”). Bharat will analyze what his special gift consists of (*emnu pradaan shu chhe*).

Keshavram Kashiram Shastree is a well-known personage, recipient of the Bharata-Bharati-Ratna (Indian National Award) and praised in Rajnee Vyas’ “The Glory of Gujarat,” along other “men of the pen” like Yashwant Shukla, Jayant Pathak,

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<sup>41</sup>Modernization is usually understood to describe the social process of a society that tackles deficiencies in education, income, nutrition, gender equality. “Progress” (*pragaati*) usually is understood to be achieved despite particularistic claims, revealing the implicit-and perhaps naïve-hope that social divisions will slowly disappear. In Bharat we see the complete usurpation of the idea of development for the religious and caste group. When Bharat speaks of “development” (*vikaas*) he always means the development of his people, the Jadav. *Pragaati* is first and foremost about the Jadav, then the *naroda rajputs*, then the Rajputs, and finally the “Hindus.” The sequence is important. It is never about the Muslims or Christians. They are outside his purview altogether. This sort of progress is based on the logic of competition, where *vikaas* (development) merely means access to new resources (symbolic as well as material). It also implies that the progress of other groups is viewed as potentially detrimental for one’s own.

and Chinu Modi. “The Glory of Gujarat” is a useful compendium of historical, economic and cultural data--accomplishments of the state of Gujarat--compiled with the intent to be complete but thoroughly hagiographic and uncritical. Vyas lauds K.K. Shastree for illuminating the Gujarati literary world with his “research based approach” (1998:175).<sup>42</sup> But Mr. Shastree is also the ex-president of the Hindu Mahasabha, founding fathers of the VHP in 1964, and its standing president to date. Shastree is portrayed wearing completely black clothes with a black Nehru cap, his forehead adorned with a cleanly painted curved thin Vaishnava sign on top of a pale face, which might as well be an inverted Shiva *lingam*.

Being an ardent agitator for a Hindu *rashtra* (the Hindu nation) and a linguist of Gujarat, Shastree is well known to academics and intellectuals. In my conversations with them, they relate many anecdotes, including hair-raising episodes of the scholar’s enthusiastic involvement in the 1969 “riots.” One person tells me the scholar had been openly criticized by Swami Satchidananda, a more progressive Gujarati saint, for publicly garlanding (*har pahevavo*) participants in the violence (*khuni*, killers). He thus honored killers (*khuni*) as *dharmviro* (protectors of religion), the Hindu version of *jehadis*. I cannot judge the accuracy of these anecdotes, but the people I talk to seem either to love or to hate him. His competence as a linguist, however, is unquestioned, having been responsible for the publication of several *shabdkosh* (dictionaries) like the *Brhad Gujarati Kosa*, for example. Now retired, he lives with his wife in a posh neighborhood of Ahmedabad. I visited him there several times in 2003. Each time, I was amazed how much the 95-year-old looked exactly as depicted in Vyas’s book, except for his clothes, now all-white instead of all-black. In person, however, his eyes are even more agile than in the illustration.

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<sup>42</sup>Rajnee Vyas, *The Glory of Gujarat*. Ahmedabad :Akshara Prakashan, 1998, second edition.

#### 4.2.6.1 On reddish Indians and whitish Brahmins

My primary interest in talking with K.K. Shastree was to understand the conceptual history of Hindutva, but I was never able to focus our discussions on this issue. In the initial days of the 2002 violence, Mr. Shastree had angered many younger generation VHP officials by openly revealing in a taped interview to Sushri Sheela Bhatt, a journalist of rediff.com, that the rampaging mobs, indeed, as suspected, had computer printouts of Muslim establishments. In order to counter the claim that the VHP had planned the violence ahead of time (long before the Godhra incident) he admitted to the reporter that the lists were prepared on the morning of the February 28, 2002 itself, "In the morning we sat down and prepared the list. We were not prepared in advance."<sup>43</sup> In other words, there was no preparation before the Godhra incident, but then they did indeed prepare for an efficient backlash.

This unguarded statement reveals that information could be obtained through voter registration lists, and therefore involved not only sophisticated planning by the VHP, but also government cooperation in the pogrom. Given official attempts to define the violence as merely a spontaneous outburst of angry mobs, the blunt and unguarded statement of an old Hindutva veteran known for his influence and insider knowledge compromised the position of public leaders, which was to deny any involvement. Before our first meeting, the VHP headquarters had muzzled the old man for this blunder, and when I met him, he was still upset, if not humiliated, by this silencing.<sup>44</sup> On the phone he grudgingly told me that he was obliged to demand a typed list of questions before any interview, which he had to pass on to the "headquarters" for approval if he was to answer any of them. I complied with this

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<sup>43</sup> Asked why they did it, he responded, "*Karvun j pade, karvun j pade* (it had to be done, it had to be done)." At <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/mar/12train.htm>, accessed March 12, 2005. Rediff.com, Tuesday March 12, 2002. Parts of the interview are also available in: CCT, Vol.1, p.288.

<sup>44</sup> The two VHP joint secretaries from Gujarat, Dr. Jaideep Patel and Dr. Kaushik Mehta, blamed the statements on Shastree's age and hearing disability. They rejected outright the suggestion that Muslim premises were targeted (CCT, Vol. II, p.139-140).

demand, but the approval never arrived. Mr. Shastree, an accomplished and proud man, was visibly embarrassed by this procedure. We could therefore, he said, not talk about anything “political,” though he insisted we meet anyway and talk about other issues.

The once powerful Mr. Shastree is now tiny and frail. The frailty is broken only by the awareness, or rather awaken-ness, in his eyes and tone of voice. I introduce myself. He has slight hearing problems, which I realized already on the phone. He talks, I mostly listen. Initially he addresses me formally, but he does not want me to use a tape-recorder. He asks for the list of questions and then reads them all, carefully, one-by-one. His mouth turns to smile now and then, but his wrinkled face does not permit a clear interpretation. He looks almost endearing, his head framed by dark glasses and a Nehru hat. After an hour, he tells me that he would refer me to the VHP officials. “All these questions are political,” he says.

I say, “What can I ask you, then?”

He smiles and says, “Well, I am a linguist.”

I respond, “Great. I have many questions about linguistics. Is it true that Gujarati is just a dialect of Hindi?”

“No, absolutely not,” he disagrees, and elaborates on the closeness of both languages, structurally as well as in many other ways. He tells me that Gujarati and Hindi differ only in some vowels and consonants. The vocabulary is the same. Then why, I think, did I have to struggle such to learn Gujarati?

In the Aryan languages, he asserts, fifty-percent of all the words are shared. He says that Doctor Max Mueller called this the “Aryan family of languages,” and not “Indo-European.” He continues, “They say there is no race like the Aryan, but I know that there is.” He has written on all of this, so, with a proud smile, he gives me a

series of articles in a recent publication, “These are all purely about linguistics...”<sup>45</sup> He tells me to come back after four days. When I leave, his wife, glancing at my face, asks me if I am Parsi.

At night I skim through the booklet he gave me, which includes a whole range of different topics with many connections between them. There are articles on Monism and Advaita Philosophy, Gujarati Phonology, Literature, and Grammar. It includes a work on “The Life of Lord Krishna,” and culminates in cultural and historical reflections such as, “Aryan Race: A Misnomer,” which argues against the Aryan invasion theory only to reverse it symmetrically; or “Hindu Life,” in which he defines Hindu *dharma* as universalistic whereas Christian and Islamic morality are restricted only to their own “cults.” The texts are full of peculiar moments, inconsistencies, and awkward juxtapositions, which upon closer analysis reveal a mind ceaselessly working through what one might call a Vedic-inflected post-colonial experience. With one exception the stage set by his writings is usually the Vedic or the Puranic. The exception is the Diaspora in America, but the article is still called “Our Cultural Heritage.” His deliberation cannot be understood without considering a certain implicit address to the West. Shastree is speaking to me, too.

For example, in “Hindu Life” he explains that “*Hinduism-Dharma*” is not a religion, as that would be called “*mazahab*,” like “*sampradaya, marga, pantha*,” which is usually translated as sect, branch, cult, and tradition. In the next sentence he complains that European scholars of the last century tended to minimize Hinduism by elevating Christianity as the “religion par excellence.” In other words, “*Hinduism Dharma*” is not a religion but should nonetheless be compared favorably to the religion of Christianity. In short, he is claiming, it cannot be compared but still he compares it favorably.

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. Shastree, K.K. “A Few Notable Articles by Shastree, Keshavram Kashiram,” Gujarat Research Society, Ahmedabad Branch, Ahmedabad, 2000.

But then why not compare Christianity to, say the *Swaminarayan sampradaya*, the *Pushti marg*, or the *Kabir panthis*? Indeed, I would make the case that given the history of Christianity some of these traditions might compare rather well. Mr. Shastree continues that for Hindus “beliefs are one’s own thing” and a person is free to practice whatever he chooses and likes (62). He then sets out to define *dharma* as that which is not merely a system of faith and worship like “religion” (say, *sampradaya*) but as “something more.” It is “something closely related to one’s soul or spirit” (62). In the following pages he lists the ten virtues that are contained in *dharma*--including physical and mental purity, total absence of anger, self-realization--and which define the “*Dharma Eternal*,” thus the “characteristics why Hinduism is, as a rule, called *Sanatana Dharma*” (sic!).

The reason why Shastree insists on comparison while disavowing it at the same time is because he is of two minds. He is not voicing genuine epistemological concern about the non-translatability of worldviews or transcendental claims like an Indologist or Anthropologist might. Many Western scholars of South Asian religious traditions have pointed to the historical and theological anachronism of a conceptual monster such as “Hinduism” (Sontheimer and Kulke 1989, von Stietencron and Dalmia 1995, Hacker 1978). Shastree retains the comparison because in many ways the comparison is his aspiration. On the level of “*Hinduism Dharma*,” Hinduism compares much more favorably to Christianity than just on the level of specific sects, particular traditions, or individual cults. Non-comparability would mean there is no exchange: nothing can be lost, but nothing can be gained either. Shastree, however, has a definite opinion about the superiority of Hinduism to Christianity, even if he has just claimed they are not really comparable.

Not being a religion proper, “*Hinduism Dharma*” is nonetheless defined as inclusive of everything South Asian (Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Sufism, sects,

cults, traditions), which is then posited as “tolerant.” “Hindu tolerance” is claimed precisely on the level of “religion,” for which it was initially disavowed. Shastree stresses that there two sort of religions in the world:

“There were and are several religions and sub-religions or cults on the surface of the Earth, in which the prophets, preceptors and priests preach that their own religion (...) is true and bring salvation for the followers, others are false, and so either the followers of other religions should give up their particular religion, and join particular ones, or should not have the right to survive and must be executed or slaughtered. They firmly believe in *proselytizing*. In Hinduism there is no restriction on one’s belief and he [sic!] is free to follow the tenets of his choice. Hence there were and are no internal bloody religious quarrels in *Hinduism*; followers of different cults lived and live together without disturbing other religious groups or individuals. Internal hatred is a particular characteristic in all proselytizing religions, where the world experienced and experiences great massacres. Hinduism strictly believes in morality” (63-64).

In Gujarat, this representation leads to a dissonant ethnographic experience, especially when meeting for the first time people, who claim to be “tolerant Hindus,” as if that was obvious (versus say, a Muslim or a Christian where it was not). Yet the very practices and beliefs of the particular traditions, sects, or castes of the “tolerant Hindu” are not at all more tolerant than in other traditions. This experience was jarring during the entire time of my field research, when a constant and palpable tension between Muslim and Hindus was manifest in Ahmedabad, even before the pogrom. Although there are many Islamic traditions or practices in Gujarat which one could securely call “tolerant,” Muslims in general seem oddly external to this discourse on tolerance. In my experience, they will in general not automatically rush to insist on this identification for themselves as do many members of Hindu groups.

In “Hinduism: Hindu way of Life” Shastree lays out the principle of *ahimsa*, and defines *dharma* as the absence of anger, greed, and desire. Dharma includes affection towards all creatures, and there is evidence for animal protection in Vedic times. “Our Cultural Heritage” propounds the use of Hindi, daily prayers, mantric contemplation, restrictions in female attire, and a vegetarian home-cooked diet as one of the ways, along with others, to remain Hindu when abroad. He mentions that compared to those *Bharatiya Indians* (read Muslims or Sikhs) who happen not to be Hindus, the Hindus fall prey to their inferiority complex when abroad and he suggests ways to “help in keeping the culture” (79).

In several articles Shastree expounds on the word “Aryan,” a topic in which he is deeply invested. In “Aryan Race: a Misnomer” he at first seems to want to debunk any racial basis for the term “Arya.” In ancient Indian literature it was used to distinguish a people from their enemies, and still today, as an adjective, it means “cultured, civilized, noble.” He argues that not one but three different races made up the speakers of the ancient Indian language called “Aryan.” These three groups, or races (*vamsh* means race, lineage, family), correspond to the Western classification Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Australoid. Thus the term “Aryan” is not applicable to one particular race, but to three races. “(...) [I]t is quite possible that in *Vaidika* times admixtures of three races namely, whitish, yellowish and blackish i.e. *Caucasoid*, *Mongoloid*, and *Austroloid* means *Chandra-Vamsa*, *Surya –Vamsa*, and *Danu-Vamsa* took place (...)” (2000:55). One might think that this line of thought will put the question of “Arya” or “Aryan” to rest.

But this is not Shastree’s conclusion; his intent never was to prove that the term “Aryan” does not denote a race. This work had already been done long ago by Max Müller, who corrected his own earlier mistake. Rather, Shastree wants to argue something much larger. He writes, “[T]he cradle or the homeland of the Aryans was



in the mid-Himalayan tract and not elsewhere in Europe or Asia (...)” (79). Citing the “famous” work of Justice Pargiter, Aryan-speaking groups did not invade India, rather there was an “outflow” of one particular branch of these Aryan speaking people through the “northwest into the countries beyond” (56). This particular branch of Aryan speaking people, were members of the “*Druhyu* clan--purely of the whitish race” (55). Shastree wants to explain--although he never says so explicitly--why the people who are West of the Himalayas, like the Afghanis, the Iranis, the Arabs, the Europeans, are of lighter complexion than the people of India (“*Bharatiya*”).

The Bharatiya continent of pre-Vedic times contained all three races at the time, he continues. Later they established relationships to each other through marriage and then were distributed into four castes--Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra—though all of them were recognized as “Aryans.” There was no racial discrimination (Shastree uses the term “color phobia”) amongst them at the time, he claims. The word *varna* (color) only later began to refer to caste and community (61).

When I return a few days later to Shastree’s residence I am interested in his reversal of the Aryan invasion theory, which culminates in something like a grand theory of Aryan world civilization. He agrees to elaborate what he means by what he wrote. He continues where we left off”

There is no Aryan race. Aryan is a civilization, a culture. Jains use the word “*arya*” as an adjective [*arya* means “of noble birth” in Gujarati]. They emerged in Kashmir, in the Himalayas. They were called the white people, the *druhyu*. They were Vedic people (...). Some of them went westward. Europe and Arabistan were populated by these Hindus, these white people. In the RgVed it is written that you should make Aryans of the world. They were the members of the moon-race (*chandra-vamsha*). Scientists call them Caucasian, as their rule stretched from the Caucasus mountains to the Himalayas. All were white people here. In the eastern half

of the Himalayas were the yellowish people, the *suri-vamsha* (the sun race), like the Chinese, the Nepalese, and the Assamese. And the third race were the Australoid, the blackish people (*danu-vamsha*), *danava*, *daitya*, *rakshasa* (demons, evil beings).<sup>46</sup>

In other words, he thinks that the Aryans are not a race, but the *druhyu* clan was purely white, Caucasian white. In addition these “Arya” were “Hindus” who lie at the foundation of all Western and Middle Eastern civilization. These contradictions remain unresolved, as Professor Shastree rushes on. He is concerned I might not understand his point exactly. Although he has already given me his writings, he takes great care that I do not misread them. While he talks to me, he dictates, “Caucasian, write ‘white’ in brackets, and Mongoloid, write ‘yellow’ in brackets, and Australoid, in bracket ‘blackish’. In Vedic times these three groups mixed with each other in *Aryavarta* (land of the Arya),” he says. “In a common Indian family even today you will find all three colors,” he chuckles wickedly, as if revealing what should remain inexplicit. “They have all mixed whereas in Europe and Arabistan, they have not mixed. They are the pure white race. During those olden times, the Hindu men would marry two wives, and thus take one from a lower rung, and thus all got mixed. The Varna system came only one thousand years later. In Kashmir, Iran, Europe...the color is pure white.” Looking at my face he unexpectedly says, “There is purity in you.”

He continues, “Look at you people in Europe. All white. The Russians. The Germans. The Swedes.” Suddenly he laughs crazily. “If they are Spanish...Only the Spanish have admixture like we do.” I realize the laugh was *Schadenfreude*. Mr.

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<sup>46</sup>The *daanava* are giants who made war against the Gods, descendants from Danu the mother of all *daanavas* and the sage Kasyapa; *daityas* are a race of titans, demons, enemies of sacrifices, descendants from Diti by Kasyapa; *rakshasa* are a class of evil beings like goblins, spirits, and demons. There are three classes of *rakshasas*, which are not equally bad but in common acceptance they disturb sacrifices, haunt places, and devour men. Some say they sprang from Brahma’s foot, other that they are the descendents of Ravanna, or Kasyapa and Khasa. In the Vishnu Purana they are the rude barbarian races subdued by the Aryans. Cf. John Dowson (1982) “A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion.”

Shastree continues, telling me about the year 1982, the time he visited the United States.

“I looked at faces. I recognized. They were all like Nagar. I saw and I knew: Nagar Brahmin.<sup>47</sup> I saw Narsi Rao, Keshan Shadru. Like Nagar [he giggles], because of common blood. The Europeans have always been cautious. They are cautious people [he means, they did not interbreed without prudence]. Muslims are always acting first, only later they are thinking.”

I ask him if it would contradict his theory that Arabs are actually members of the moon race if it were true that whiter people are more cautious about interbreeding? No, because, he says, Muslims in Gujarat are not Arabs; they are really converted low-castes. With “Muslims” Shastree means only Gujaratis, the Gujarati Muslims, converted from lower castes (sic!).

Shastree carries on that the Untouchables were previously Kshatriyas, which is why they carry the names they do, like his postman for example. Even today the *chamaar* (tanner) and some *vaNkar* (weaver) have whitish skin, but the *bhangi* (sweepers) always have blackish skin.<sup>48</sup> There is much evidence for this, he says. The Muslim invaders brought the Bhangis by force from the tribal belts, the Adivasi (tribals), and they had to clean latrines for Muslim women and men. Tribals are blackish and the Muslim rulers brought them. “See, during the moon dynasty, there was no untouchability. It cannot have been Vedic or Hindu because there were no latrines in the houses. People were going to compound walls.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>The Nagar Brahmin are not only of very white complexion, but also considered the most noble of all Brahmins of Gujarat.

<sup>48</sup>*Bhangi* (sweepers) are generally considered the lowest of the three untouchables castes next to Vankar (weavers) and Chamar (tanners).

<sup>49</sup>Shastree refers to the incredibly humiliating practices characterizing untouchability. It is still within a generation’s memory that it implied carrying overhead buckets filled with feces and urine taken from houses. This practice has been confirmed to me by lower caste informants as common before the introduction of modern toilets or sewage systems.

For Shastree, both the social dominance of the Vaniyas today, as well as the facts of untouchability, are historical products of the Muslim invasion. Muslims made Kshatriyas into untouchables and mixed them with tribals, although their distinction can still be seen by their skin color (*bhangi* are blacker than *vaNkar* or *chamaar*). Vaniyas rose and assumed their place and thus are dominant today.

I wonder how Shastree explains Brahmins like himself, so I ask him about his own background. He tells me he was born in the Junagadh district, in Mangrol, which used to be a Muslim state. It was the place where Mahmud Al Ghazni, the Turkic ruler of Ghazna (Afghanistan), first came when the invading Muslim armies entered Saurashtra in the 1026. He laughs and says, “Kaushik Mehta [secretary of the Ahmedabad VHP] will not be able to tell you that.” The Sayids first came to Mangrol, that is why there is a Mangroli Shah (Pir, Muslim saint), and his tomb is in Patan (North Gujarat). The Hindus in Saurashtra helped the Muslims to come into the north and central areas, where they behaved much more like bastards than they did in Junagadh. Shastree remembers a former student, Nasruddin, the son of the Muslim King of Mangrol, who he very much liked.

Only after 1947, Shastree tells me, did it all begin. “There was no fear in Saurashtra before. Today, there is fear. It was all peaceful. The Hindus were never aggressive, and always obeyed.” But there was, he says, a slow, systematic conversion of Hindus into Muslims. He elaborates,

“The Muslims were farmers, the Ghanchis of Mangrol. Then, there were the Audiche Brahmins of Siddhpur who became Daudi Vohras, that is Shia. Shias are always in danger. They are always oppressed, from the Sunnis. They are oppressed everywhere. The Khojas used to be Lohanna Thakker before (a Hindu merchant caste). One can even see that in their names, for example: Rehmatbhai Vasantbhai (Rehmat is a Muslim name, Vasant a Hindu name). You can still see that in their

father's name. Mohammad Ali Jinna was an Aga Khani ("Ali"). The Momins were Marwaris (a Hindu merchant group from Rajasthan). The Mohammadian Sultans of Gujarat were all originally Hindus, too, (he laughs). They were Thaks, which was a Rajput class."<sup>50</sup>

He looks at me and tells me, almost clandestinely, "Reconversion takes place now especially amongst Christians." I ask him to explain, and he says, "There are Harijans, who became Christians, and when they become Hindu again, they again become Harijan." He shakes his head and waves away another question of mine. There is so much confusion among Hindus today, he says.

We are interrupted by the postman, who approaches through the garden and delivers something. He had already mentioned him. The man is shy and shows exaggerated deference. Professor Shastree jokes with him. He tells me later, that his postman is a "*paarmaar*," that is, a low caste. "Some say *makwana* like *macwon* or *mcguire*," he crackles. "Ha ha." I do not care to understand the joke. "That is how they try to change everything. They all claim to be *kshatriya*." (But didn't he just tell me they were in fact precisely that?)

Then he reminds me that many Muslims, like the Mollesalams, venerate Parvati, Durga, and all the Matajis, who all have different names but are really one and the same." He offers examples. But for Shastree, all these cases only serve to confirm his thesis that Gujarati Muslims are really Hindus, converted Hindus. The very fact that many Muslims even today follow diverse heterodox practices, or shun orthodoxy altogether, is interpreted as evidence for the historical scandal of conversion. This is significant because it contradicts so radically the prevailing logic in many academic circles (especially outside India). There "syncretism," "plural ethos," or "composite culture" is often maintained as an answer to cultural alienation between Hindus and

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<sup>50</sup>Note that most of these groups were not at all lower caste in any meaningful sense of the term.

Muslims in India (Rajni Kothari 1998, Ashish Nandi 2002). When Shastree sees a Muslim showing devotion for the Goddess, however, he sees a Muslim alienated from his true being, a Hindu, who was converted some times in the past. In this view he resembles an orthodox Muslim. Both lend each other a hand.

The final time I meet Professor Shastree, he returns to the year 1982 and his visit to the US. He tells me he went there to study the “Red Indians.” I find this revelation puzzling, and I can tell that he knew it would startle me. In fact, the old man is delighted by my astonishment. The Red Indians came from East Asia, he explains, and they took with them all the language, customs, and architecture,

“The oldest Sanskrit was in the RgVed, 1500 BC, and the language of the Red Indians is related to it. Vedic is the original mother tongue of them. Impartial Europeans scholars have said that there were *crores* (millions) of Mongoloid people in America, which were wiped out. Portuguese and the Spanish massacred *lakhs* (hundred of thousands) of people. Jakobi says the Mongoloids came over that it is 4000 BC-6000 BC. Tilak Maharaj says 6000-10000 B.C. I say 10000-73000 BC. They went over Bering. When the water was 450 feet down. It was a *sayogi bhoomi* (a pilgrimage through the sea). They crossed with their cows.”

Then Shastree says, “Did you know that the Lithuanian accent has preserved the pure RgVedic accent?” I remain silent. “In converted churches--[he means churches that were the product of conversion]--three idols are kept even today: Christ, Mary, and Son.<sup>51</sup>” “They are the idol-worshippers but we are called like this,” he laughs, referring to the colonial cliché of the quintessential “Hindoo.” “The Christians have nothing like this. It is old, very old.” Mr. Shastree means by old tradition, a

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<sup>51</sup>There is a sort of pun in the pun here because the “three idols” are of course also a reference the *trimurti* of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva. The *trimurti* is the preferred form of divinity used by RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) activists. In their opinion it encompasses all the divinities of Hinduism and beyond.

civilization stretching back to the dawn of time and knowledge. At this point, I tire and quit taking notes. There is no more a line to follow.

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We can see in Professor Shastree's thought and theory something similar to Bharat's corporeal experience of *allagi*. Like Bharat, Shastree has to expel that with which he feels himself identified, a darkness and division that is internal to the Indian nation. Shastree's abjection takes a detour by critiquing the notion of race ("Arya"), then introducing three races instead of one, and designating one as the original "Arya," which happened to be Caucasian and "whitish." If the Aryans did not come from central Asia conquering Aryavarta and subjecting the "Anarya" (rude aboriginal tribes), but instead emerged from the Himalayas spreading out into the world, how can Shastree nonetheless retain the distinction between himself and "them," that tribal element in his self? Shastree wants only to cancel out that part of the racial classification which defines him as what was once called the dark, un-noble, aboriginal tribes (*anarya*). Thus "*druhyu*" is Caucasian, a race he identifies on the street in America in a visit there. "Arya" for Shastree is really Brahman, racially the same as the Caucasian race. Shastree looks into American faces and sees himself, the most noble of Gujarati Brahmins, the Nagar, the Arya, the Druhyu.

Only later do the other races become part of the cultural category "Aryan" (not Arya) by acquiring the ancient language of the noble Aryas. In this way he can accept these other races to be Indian, while at the same time not confusing them with the original "*druhyus*," the whitish Brahmins. In fact they are so Indian that they even include the Red Indians in North America, whose culture is a remnant of the old Aryan civilization. The reason why Shastree engages in this intellectual gymnastics is partly because he is emotionally incapable of inhabiting a genuinely anti-racist position. In some way, despite his resentment of the British and the West, a

racializing discourse that originates with the former colonial powers resonates perfectly well with him. After all, he writes, “Purity of descent is the soul of Hinduism” (65) and in his statements above he lauds the cautiousness of the British, who abstained from interbreeding (by comparison with the French in North Africa). To denounce the legitimacy of all forms of exclusivity would link him to those with whom he does not want to be associated: the blackish tribals, and perhaps even the yellowish Asians, who in the depth of his heart are more necessary to expel than it is to hate any whitish Arab, “Britisher,” or American.

Thus racism is re-inscribed in the very moment when it seems to be disavowed. But this racism is a complicated one. In a typical gesture, his enmity to the West is resolved not by rejecting but by including it within the self. The circle of “I” is enlarged and he claims the West as his own (with the possible exception of Spain, which also fell prone to “admixture”). Moreover, Shastree insists on maintaining the boundaries to that which the West identified as being “Indian,” those groups that he wants to expel: the darkish, the impure, the tribal, the primitive. Shastree appropriates a formerly Western gaze, forwarding it to those he is forced to include (to tolerate) as *Bharatiya* (Indians).

I began my description of these conversations with K.K. Shastree by expressing my regret that I was never actually directly able to discuss *hindutva* with him. In some way, however, we talked about nothing else. Shastree’s twisted discussion of “Aryas” and “Aryans” is extremely informative. It serves the sole function to cancel out anything Indian from “Arya,” making it the carrier of an identity that is exclusively white, the *chandra-vamsha* of the lunar dynasty. Shastree assimilates Western notions of racial purity and reworks them through Brahman exclusivity. One can see here what Mahatma Gandhi had suspected a long time ago,



that at the very core of the ideology of *hindutva* lies an incredible loathing for anything genuinely Indian.

Shastree leaves no doubt as to what kind of “Arya” he belongs to. The members of the “lunar race”--unless they have interbred with other races--are quite simply identifiable by the whiteness of their skin, in the same way during colonial times one could distinguish a “*Britisher*” from a “*coolie*.” Mr. Shastree is very conscious of his relative white-ness. In fact, his penultimate utterance before I left his apartment was, “I have always liked white people.” I have absolutely no doubt about that.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.2.6.2 *Bhakti* and the circle of “I”

Bharat explains his motivation to come to the city and enter a university as a desire to teach and to take care, by himself, not only of his own future children’s education but also of his brother’s children. In this way all of them will have a good starting point in, he explains, “education.” To become a teacher, with a bachelors degree in education, was a strategic way to try to get a foothold and some control over the modern, urban world. For Bharat, to become a teacher was to bring home one of the modern magic words, “education.” He will bring this resource home not so much by becoming educated, but by becoming the person who actually educates (“lecturer,” or *shikshak*, teacher). To bring education home means to start taking part in it, building access to it, being associated with it, not necessarily to be well educated. The logic is as simple as it is true: the family gets its own teacher who takes care of the rest of the family. Important is not the desire or talent to be a teacher, but access to the resource “education.”

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<sup>52</sup>In November 2004, the “Golden Jubilee of Akhil Bharatiya Darshan Parishad” was held at a Swaminarayan temple in Ahmedabad, where Pramukh Swami presented a memento to 100 year-old K.K. Shastree honoring him for his lifetime achievements.

<http://www.swaminarayan.org/news/2004/11/darshanparishad/>, accessed April 19, 2005.

When I ask him why he chose Gujarati from all possible subjects, given the fact that it is the most unlikely of majors ever to translate easily into a prospective job, he tells me somewhat indignantly, “But I am Gujarati.” He uses the same intonation as he does in saying, “I am Hindu.” It is as if that fact could be taken away. To Bharat there is an urgent consistency in his decision to study this subject. It makes sense to study what one is: Gujarati. Perhaps it is a sign of the condition of being a subaltern farmer in a city of a postcolonial society that Bharat studies Gujarati literature *not* in order to escape or reflect critically on Gujarat and Gujaratis, as might be the case with a German or French student of literature, but on the contrary, to actually become himself more fully.

Another time, when we discuss the decision further, Bharat reveals that after he asked for advice from his geography schoolteacher at home, a Brahmin, about what to study in the city, he was told to study Gujarati. Thereafter, Bharat never seriously considered studying anything else, and he says he was never curious about what skills all the other disciplines at his university had to offer. Once in Ahmedabad, he encountered Professor Vyas, another Brahmin, and head of the Department of Linguistics (Bhasha Bhavan) at Gujarat University. Professor Vyas told him to continue to study linguistics together with Gujarati, and Bharat became his *vidhyarti* (student). It made sense to Bharat to study a discipline that makes you understand language. To know what language is, is to understand the very tool with which teaching occurs, the tool that allows for “education.” To know what language is, is to understand what it does: it educates.

Later, he acknowledges that it perhaps would have been better to learn English also. This lack is the single most important disadvantage to finding those jobs in the city that he has come to appreciate over the years. I stayed in Ahmedabad on and off over four years, and lived with Bharat several times, totaling more than twelve

months. Yet, in this time, he was unable to pick up English, although he now speaks better Gujarati, a hybrid of English and Gujarati, than before.

Bhandari and Vyas are both involved in the education of tribals in Banaskantha. The question of the English language thus comes up several times in discussion and both see the desire of the lower caste and tribal groups to learn English as unacceptable and a real threat to the cultural integrity of Gujarat. As Arvindbhai Bhandari has it, “They want to learn English before they even speak Gujarati.” He has absolutely no sympathy for this desire although he is aware how different in ethos and culture tribals are, how they are excluded from mainstream culture in almost everything they are or stand for, and how little they can benefit or achieve in that world which demands fluent Gujarati from them.

Bharat also likes the idea of being a lecturer more than he likes the idea of actually teaching students. The tuition classes he arranges to teach in middle-class houses in Ambavadi and Navrangpura are skipped by him (the teacher!) once too often, and when I accompany him, I realize his relationship to the children he is supposed to teach is problematic. Indeed, his relationship to the middle-class household is rather awkward. The sessions appear as if it is not the young students who are overwhelmed by the authority of their teacher but Bharat who is overwhelmed by the authority of their middle class lifestyle. Once, he discussed the interior of the apartment with me, while his two students sat awkwardly and quietly waiting to be taught something by their teacher. I suspect Bharat did not enjoy teaching much because he did not command enough respect in private tutoring.

Once I offered to finance a private English course for Bharat at a one of the centers recommended to me. Even though they have unfortunate epithets such as “Personality Development Center,” “International Personality School,” or “Oxford Personality Development,” they are the best schools available. Bharat never declined

directly, but he hesitated for reasons I could not understand. Friends and acquaintances told me he would never learn anyway and that he would feel out of place in such schools. Many students in such centers are from higher class and caste backgrounds, and Bharat would surely feel foolish among them, aspiring to the same status as they did. If he struggled in the state-run university, where competition is light though the teachers are an educated class of mostly Brahmins, he would drown in the competitive private English school.

Another explanation for Bharat's choice of studying linguistics and Gujarati is that it was all that was available to him, because the brighter students with better educational background—that is, higher class and caste background—went into management, business, or medicine, where he could not compete. They begin to study English earlier, they develop competence with computers, and they visit so-called “Personality Schools.” Bharat, a first generation farmer in the university, became the new student for an old guard of Brahmin teachers in Gujarati and linguistics, who felt their bastions of learning were now inundated with masses of what they consider unprepared and untalented students with little genuine interest in the disciplines they teach.

Bharat's solution to the pressures and strictures of his academic environment was to resort to formal status, something he could easily learn, form without much content. This sort of behavior is well prefigured in Gujarati religious traditions, which are deeply influenced by Vaishnava devotionism or *bhakti*. It is perceptible in Piri-Muridi and Guru-Shishya relationships as well as one of the dominant forms of popular religious worship denoting not only devotion but also “adoration, worship, reverence, and loyalty” (GED).<sup>53</sup> Although historically often read as critique of rigid

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<sup>53</sup>The only author I have found who alludes to the fact of *bhakti* hindering emancipation in a political context is Jaffrelot (2003:204).

caste hierarchy, in the field of education it does not unbalance established hierarchies. In fact, it stabilizes them.

Puzzled by the relationships I encounter in the University between students and their advisors, Bharat's academic advisor Professor Vyas, a very learned man fluent in English, explained to me in 2000 the role of a "true teacher" (a Guru) in contradistinction to a "mere teacher." The Guru does not give mere knowledge or information. A real teacher gives "knowledge by intuition." The Guru takes responsibility for the student, he "enlarges the circle of 'I,'" and ideally encompasses the entire world. When all information is in the student's head, like pieces of a chain, he is the one who offers the links that brings everything together.

This link can never be learned by gathering mere information. The student has to trust the teacher's estimates. Trust, however, means to submit. "*Gnan* is knowledge, but only if you have faith can you have knowledge. The Guru gives knowledge, the teacher only information. Knowledge needs intuition. The *faido* (benefit) for the Guru is for all *samaaj* (society). The circle of self is *samaaj* (society). Self-interest is natural, but the interest of *samaaj* is my self-interest as a Guru." This is the simple trick that Vyas has to offer me: self-interest and interest in others is no contradiction if the self is enlarged to encompass the world.

#### 4.2.7 The RSS, a job, and a marriage

In early 2002, after a long spell as a private tutor, it looks as though Bharat, with the help of his academic advisor and his uncle, a RSS man from Mahesana, finally got his desired job as lecturer at a local university. Despite his small university I.D. card with the flattering adage "lecturer" on it, the job at Ambedkar University he obtained turned out to be not lecturing but basic office work. It took Bharat some weeks to digest this humiliation. Finally, he complained openly to me that he is actually no real "lecturer," and that they will never let him lecture to any students

despite the fact that he always enjoyed the work of teaching. He always enjoyed standing in front of a group of students, well groomed, with oiled hair and ironed shirts. I accompanied Bharat to these performances several times while he was still a student. He always made a somewhat stiff but certainly always spirited performance.

Bharat always knew of my interest in RSS ideology, and especially, in its ritual practices of “play.” But in the many years we have known each other, he never found it important to tell me that he was a member of the RSS. After the pogroms and his marriage, Bharat informed me that he had rejoined an urban *shakha* in Ahmedabad. Busy with his studies, he had not visited one for some time. Initially when Bharat and I started living together he began reading several vernacular papers regularly and expressed his amazement that reporters in articles always treated RSS, VHP, and BD as if they were separate institutions. Bharat always insisted that they were basically one and the same. Given his experience of the Sangh Parivar, the careful distinctions drawn out in the Gujarati press did not make much sense to him.

The fact that Bharat withheld this information, and did not tell me for many years that he had been involved in the RSS, is an experience that I share with many Gujaratis. Suddenly to discover a friend or a neighbor is a member of the RSS is common in Gujarat. Such knowledge is, of course, rarely shared with Muslims, and those of an older generation naturally feel distrust and betrayal upon such a discovery. A younger generation has assimilated this experience and many a young Muslim suspects many Hindus of being members or at least sympathizing with these organizations.

This sense of betrayal first came to my attention when I was engaged in language study in Baroda in 2001. I was discussing the effects of the 1969 riots with a group of orthodox middle-aged Muslim men, and they would embarrass me by making fun of my attempts to learn Gujarati. I should instead learn Hindi, they told me, the

language of India, or Urdu, the poetic tongue of Muslims. I had had some experience with Gujarati Muslims before, but here I was astonished at their relentless belittling of Gujarat's language, culture, cuisine, and ways.

The Fatehganj area is a former Parsi neighborhood now deserted by the community, who moved to Bombay. The old Parsi fire temple, however, is still present, if unused. The area is looked upon as "cosmopolitan" mainly for three reasons. First, it has a closely mixed residential population of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims; second university students from all over India and many international students (like me) frequent the area; and third there are many non-vegetarian restaurants.

Jehangir, a telephone exchange operator, born in 1950, married with one son, tells me of his experience: He was nineteen at the time of the 1969 communal violence, and had many Hindu friends. They remained close during and after the violence in Ahmedabad, in part by avoiding discussion of politics and religion. They would simply meet, go to each other's marriages and festivals, and never talk about these traumatic days of violence. Merely by coincidence, two years later, he discovered that a close friend and his son were members in a local RSS unit. Jehangir felt so betrayed and hurt that he eventually moved to Karachi, Pakistan, to start a new life. He returned a year later realizing he did not have enough connections and clout to make it in the foreign country. At the time I met Jehangir, having been in Pakistan considerably heightened his status amongst Gujarati Muslims of the area. But after his return from Karachi, he felt permanently alienated from his former Hindu friends and stayed away from them, expecting that many would perhaps be RSS members. Jehangir claims that it is only this experience that led him to become a "*pakka* Muslim" (a pure or a full Muslim). "I was not always like this," he told me. I was astonished by his rather odd apologetic disclosure, which suggests some distance

between himself and his overly pious religious performance. If he meets them today, he says, he might nod and even say “hello,” but there will be no further exchange. One has grown apart silently, he says. I ask him if that was not very painful. “Yes, very painful,” he says affirmatively. “Painful it was,” he repeats.

We sit together in his telephone shop. His customers are from all communities. Jehangir treats them all equally, but lowers his voice if he talks about the RSS with someone else in the shop. I always wonder if he sees his former Hindu friend. Unfortunately in 2002 Fatehganj area, too, witnessed serious neighborhood violence.

Jehangir experiences two levels of exile. He has gone into the inner exile after he attempted an external one. The silence of the disappointment about his Pakistani Muslims brethren is like the silence to his former Hindu friends whom he avoids more than disdains. Pakistanis have become Hindu friends who disappoint him. In all but one case known to me, Muslims disappointed by the activities of Hindu friends have never confronted their friends directly. It seems as if in Gujarat no one allows for direct conflictual confrontation. Rather the energy is transformed into the exile of identity and, finally, ritual bouts of communal violence. It’s a silence breeding rage, and a calmness begetting hate.

My initial language professors, Arvindbhai Bhandari and Yogendra Vyas, whom I had known since 1999, also revealed to me shortly before the pogroms in 2002 that they both had been active members of the RSS in their younger years. Professor Bhandari tells me the RSS is not a violent institution. It’s a peaceful organization, but it acts as protection and thus can be very violent at times. Professor Vyas tells me that he is an ex-RSS enthusiast for four years but turned Gandhian due to the tutelage of his Guru, the acclaimed poet Umashanker Joshi, whose picture was the only one in Vyas’s spartan office at Gujarat University. He said Gandhi’s writings



convinced him to change. Then he started to believe in non-violence and ahimsa. It was Gandhi, he concludes, who really was the “strong man.”

He explains that he believed in the strength and the toughness that physical exercise and training (*kasrat*) attempted to achieve. His father, a Congressman, did not like his decision but could not do much about it. He does not remember any anti-Muslim speeches in the RSS. There also were no food restrictions, another sort of toughness, but he was a strict vegetarian anyway. At the time, he says, he did not care about that. He speculates that today they probably have anti-Muslim slogans in the RSS. Vyas claims the Shiv Sena is the militant wing of the RSS (sic!) and he compares the Shiv Sena with SIMI (Student Islamic Movement of India). “They are all terrorists,” he says. “Hindus too,” he adds.

Bharat initially joined the RSS in 1994, “*mara image mate*” ostensibly for his image, and he did so soon after his father died and his family sent him to Ahmedabad. Initially he only served food at marriages and did kitchen-work in his home village. Today in his village, being the most successful man in matters of “education” in his village, he provides information about it to others. Members of his community as well as those more distantly related--affinal or blood relations with his village kin--ask him for support and information on such matters as what one should study in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> standard, how one gets admission, how to complete exams, what has to be learned, who has to be bribed, and what degrees to actually acquire or achieve? He is proud that his “academic success” qualifies him as a real leader (*mota manas*, lit. a big man) in his home village.

For his fellow villagers, Bharat is now an “arbitrator” (*saamujan*, a care-taker), but in the future he wants to become a *mota manas* (big, important man). Being connected to urban Ahmedabad, he can command twenty-five *manaso* (persons) in his home village, which is especially important during elections. They trust him and

would follow his call. He is something like a “*small pracharak*,” he tells me smilingly, a reference to the Prime Minister C.M. Narendra Modi, a “*big pracharak*.” But “*very very small*,” he says, invoking his charm.

In 10 years, however, he asserts that he will be a “*mota manas*” (big man). I asked him what advantages that will have and he replies, “If you are alone you don’t get help. You are defined always by your followers.” He explains: If you have a bike or scooter accident, for example, not only is it dangerous, but if you are alone, the bureaucratic work can waste three entire days. But if you have friends, followers, and connections, you are a *mota manas*, and everything will not take more than three hours.

Being “lecturer” has even more fundamental advantages than just evading penalties by traffic police. It will open up new possibilities for a better marital choice. He can now demand a wife who is more educated. Not that the actual education of his future wife is a major concern. As he tells me bluntly many times, he needs a wife for only three reasons: housework (*ghar nu kaam karva mate*), to bear his children (*balko*), and for enjoyment (*bhogvaava mate*). By enjoyment he means primarily sexual pleasure, a desire that in his opinion will be active for about five years and then wither away. Bharat has difficulties or perhaps does not wish to imagine older men and women enjoying sexual activity. Since he has no theory of sublimation to turn to, he explains that desire will simply wane and disappear. For now, he is proud that he can demand a woman from a different and larger pool of possible marriage partners—all because “education” has increased his worth.

Since 1999, Bharat has shared with me his trials and tribulations with women. Once, in 2000, he invited three close friends from the same caste to our apartment, and asked to rent a television and video recorder so they could take advantage of an apartment not being watched by others. It was a sort of a compromise as he had asked

me for several days, half-jokingly, half-serious, if I would not like to bring a prostitute home some day. He would, he said, “share in.” He was adamant that there were many throughout the city, and he insisted that these women, too, desired sex. For a college student who moves from family quarters where all space is shared to a college dorm where they also have no privacy, access to a completely empty and private apartment opens a Pandora’s box of desires. At first I was surprised by the extent and intensity of his sexual fantasies.

An empty apartment means inviting a stranger over, and being shielded from the constant gazes that control one’s behavior. The possibility of no one else watching fascinated Bharat, even if that fact ended quite radically behind the door’s threshold in the hallway of the apartment building already, where all the residents participate in each other’s lives. I finally agreed to a pornographic evening. Bharat brought the three friends (caste affiliates), and the required equipment, a TV and a video-recorder lent at a place specializing in such things.

The viewing itself was a spectacle. For me, Bharat (unmarried), Pravin (married), and Rajan (unmarried) were much more interesting than the movie. Crouched close to each other on the floor glued to the TV they asked me questions during the entire movie, then fell silent, fascinated by what they had just seen. Pravin asked if “that” was true, if they [Americans, I suspect] do “that.” His question was if the practices shown in the movie were those that Americans generally engage in when having sex. Bharat instead was fascinated by the question, if what he saw was real or merely the acting of professional actors. And if it was merely acting, was it not still real, given the fact of what he witnessed the actors doing? Bharat reflected upon the nature of what he saw given the aggressive explicitness of the visual material confronted with. Lips really touched, hands really grabbed, mouths really tasted,

openings were really penetrated. Was this still acting? Was this still simulation? He came to the conclusion that it was real as it was happening on screen for all to see.

Personally, he considered it all scandalous. The fact that the actors were acting and that the movie was not real life was secondary, ultimately, because the fantasy world the actors were acting out was something so strictly forbidden that merely simulating it was equivalent to living it. You cannot “play” to kiss someone by kissing someone (or some part of someone), as Bharat has it. If you kiss someone in real in order to act a role to kiss somebody, you cannot later claim it was “only” acting, and thus not real. A kiss is a kiss.

The claim to act in the kiss is only legitimate if the kiss remains somewhat unreal, as is the case in depiction of “kisses” in classic Bollywood movies. The audience can see the artificiality of the act, and in remaining somewhat unreal, the act is able to signify the real thing. In this pornographic movie, however, the acting *is* the act; there is no signification of the act, or rather: there is no labor visible in order to signify the act. Everything seems all too real. And as pornographic movies certainly do not attempt to sustain the unreality of the act (only the stupefying narratives surrounding the sexual acts are somewhat unreal), Bharat is somewhat right in his own way. Indeed, the actors are having sex on the scene.

This experience is significant as it suggests a slightly different relationship to how and what is depicted in a moving picture. It explains why until very recently, there is so little kissing (or more explicit sexual behavior) in Indian movies, while one cannot say that they lack any eroticism. Even if some Bollywood actress kisses some actor in a rare scene, the film grammar framing the scene often seems strangely naïve in comparison to the sophistication of dance scenes and the straightforward sexuality that dance scenes often portray.

That is also why many Gujaratis, female or male, will call Indian actresses “prostitutes,” and venerate them at the same time, although these actors are not acting in anything that could be understood to be a pornographic movies. When I asked Bharat why a friend of ours called the actress Ashwarya Rai a prostitute, he explained to me, she is a prostitute because she has to put herself in all these poses, poses that are real even if played. And then she allows male actors to pose with her in these poses. There is a constant *as if*, that frequently breaks down into an *is*, which constitutes the sexual tension of the movie in question. The poses are real because an actress actually really executes (performs) them in order to “play” them. Again, for Bharat, the reality of the pornographic depictions eviscerated the idea that this was just a movie and the actors only acting.

The pornographic movie we were watching itself was much more extreme in its depictions than anything Bharat and his friends had ever seen. They were used to the occasional sight in a wet sari scene or a simulated kiss in the romantic Bollywood movies they saw.<sup>54</sup> The movie was an American brew of “plumber meets housewife,” “French tourist encounters American cowboy,” and “group of company colleagues having a party with whipped cream in a Jacuzzi,” and it depicted the usual sex scenes: diverse positions, men performing orally cunnilingus on women and vice versa, penises rubbed on big breasts, women sitting on a huge leather couch with legs apart.

For Bharat the movie was exciting but simultaneously disappointing. It suggested too much, the acts were too real. In what he was seeing there was no subtlety, no question anymore of breaching limits. Unable to separate himself from the TV during the viewing, he was desirously disgusted by what he was finally able to see. But ultimately, it showed too much “inside flesh,” too many intimate body parts from

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<sup>54</sup>Wet sari scenes are one of the many filmic tools for erotic production in the more classic Bollywood movies. Usually the hero and heroine dance with one another, or encounter each other, in a thick monsoon rain, which inadvertently reveals every little curve of their well-exercised bodies under their clothes.

too many angles. He did not wish to imagine these scenes in such detail. Pravin, by contrast, enjoyed it fully and later spoke as if what he had seen belonged to the highest art of sexual fulfillment. Rajan remained largely silent but with an obvious erection throughout. After the first quarter hour, I retired to my room, but Bharat came after me and insisted I finish watching the movie with them. It was as if I had abandoned him with visual material he had problems processing. He wanted me to be responsible and answerable for the viewing. What elicited Bharat's most negative reaction were the scenes of oral sex on women. They confirmed his worst suspicions about Western sex, and he never again approached me for a pornographic video.<sup>55</sup>

For the first years of our friendship, everywhere he lived, he would hang next to his mirror a self-painted picture of Renjenben, a local "village woman"--Bharat always emphasizes--and the girl that his family had initially arranged for marriage many years ago. He had secretly drawn her picture in pencil copied from a forbidden photograph someone had shown him. Whenever Bharat used to comb his hair, he looked at Renjenben. He had met her only once officially, and once he glanced at her unofficially but they barely dared to speak. Walking over Nehru-bridge at night, passing love and married couples seated in the cool breeze, he once described to me how he imagines Renjenben living with him in the city, cooking for him, caring for him. He would take her by the hand, the way he takes my hand, and they would stroll over the bridge at night after dinner, and when they return home they would make love. It is a romantic and sweet picture about a relation with a woman he is supposed to marry but has never known.

Over the years, however, Bharat got accustomed to speaking to many female students in the university and college subculture of Ahmedabad. He says it is absurd that he has now spoken to many strange women but hardly to his future wife. Once, in

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<sup>55</sup>Bharat's oral "hesitations" relates to two isomorphic objects: meat that is to be eaten in the market or oral sex on women and their reddish "inside flesh" (their vagina).

a spontaneous and somewhat foolish act, he dares to drive the two to three hours all the way to his would-be wife's residence in Rajkot district to meet and talk to her. He wants to know what she thinks about living in a city instead of the country, and what her goals are in raising children. But this breach of conduct is not appreciated. His would-be in-laws categorically and vehemently prevent him from even greeting her. He returns angry, tired from the long trip, and depressed.

After this episode, Bharat decides to terminate his several year-old engagement in his village and instead marry his true love, Gita, a former student of his academic advisor and guru. He will, he says, reveal his true love and his intent to marry. This decision comes unraveled, however, as he first reveals to his guru, in a fit of guilt, that, despite having been promised to marry Renjenben, he had a love affair with Gita. Worst of all, he had engaged in illicit pre-marital sex with her on his honorable Guru's property. The professor had offered Bharat a cheap room in an empty house in a good neighborhood close to the university that had once belonged to his daughter. Another former student and Brahmin, a competent English teacher and a superior to Bharat, caught him *in flagranti*, causing a minor scandal in the attentive neighborhood. When the Brahmin teacher told me the story he excused what I considered his indiscretion with the devotion he felt toward his former Guru and the purity of his name. Bharat's behavior was not only a breach of trust and bad conduct, but evocative also of the old Vedic interdiction that having sex with one's Guru's wife is the worst of all sins.

Since Bharat's father was dead and his academic advisor soured by his behavior, his uncle, a local lower rank RSS leader, took up the paternal role. After conferring with Bharat's academic advisor in Ahmedabad, the uncle demanded that Bharat not marry Gita, the girl he had chosen for himself. On Bharat's behalf, I asked his advisor why the marriage should not go forward. He explained that though Gita was from the same community and caste as Bharat, her father was a "*panwalla*,"

someone who sells what Bharat and his advisor refer to as *dushaNo* (nuisances, addictions), a low occupation for the father of a wife of such an ambitious young man.

Eventful weeks follow in which Bharat is put under enormous emotional pressure from caste affiliates, academic staff, and especially his uncle and academic advisor. Several times he breaks down and cries and searches consolation with me. Bharat finally marries another woman altogether to the horror of Gita, a “compromise” between his angered family, his confused desires, as well as his RSS uncle’s and advisor’s influence, who both hold the key to his future career. Bharat is very concerned about the status and goodwill of his advisor and RSS. It is now that he rejoins a local RSS *shakha* (branch) daily for *kasrat* (exercise) in Ahmedabad and he shows me proudly his kaki shorts and cap. It turns out that Gita seems much more courageous than he is, as she remains firm in her wish to marry him.

After Bharat gives in to this marital arrangement he gets a job. He tells me that he always thought that one should not support corruption, but he had no choice. The higher social status Bharat has now achieved, certificated through his lecture card, will allow him to interact more self-confidently with post office employees, garage owners, bank officials, and especially traffic police. In February 2002 Bharat tells me of a recent incident where a traffic police officer stopped him at Sadar Vallabhai Patel Stadium in Usmanpura for driving in the wrong direction. It is normal sometimes to drive on the wrong side of the road in Ahmedabad, especially since the traffic authorities have recently erected annoying traffic dividers all over, which force vehicles to take long detours to change directions while many residents like Bharat are chronically short of cash for gas.

In the ensuing conversation, once the officer realized that Bharat was a “lecturer” at a College that his son also visits, he puts his pen demonstrably back into his pockets. He asks Bharat which subject he teaches, tells him his’ son’s name, and



the year he is in. Bharat makes sure to repeat the name and then says “*barabar chhe*” (that’s o.k.) and the policeman sends him on his way. Bharat laughs when telling me this. “This is India, Indian style,” he tells me in English, picking up on the phrases I taught him. He did not even have to tell him that he does not teach his son, let alone know him, or that “lecturer” is a euphemism for someone doing office work whose importance is that of a peon while the pay is a little more. It’s understood. Just the fact that he has a job there was enough, and that he said, “I am a lecturer.” Bharat is fascinated by this incident himself, when he narrates the little story to me. The moment the policemen put the pen back into his pocket, Bharat knew, all is well.

## Chapter 5.0 Pratab and the thumbnail version of *ahimsa*

### 5.1 Significant omissions

On May 1, 2002 while skimming through the Times of India in the morning an astonishing “mistake” met my eye. The mistake was made in an appeal published through the newspaper by the government of Gujarat commemorating the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of the existence of the state, which was founded in 1960. The appeal was a plea to give a “present of peace and harmony to the state of Gujarat” on its “journey” (read life). Four prominent Gujaratis were cited in succession, Mahatma Gandhi, Sadar Vallabhai Patel, Ravishankar Maharaj, and Narendra Modi. With the probable exception of Narendra Modi, all these figures are without doubt considered “Gandhians,” and a sentence in English attributed to each of them is reproduced. Except for the Chief Minister, none of them is portrayed meeting the eye of the reader (see photographs below), perhaps signifying the absence and the remoteness of the ideals they stood for even in the very moment they are portrayed.

Sadar Vallabhai Patel (1875-1950), freedom fighter and Gandhian, is the most prominent Gujarati after Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). He was responsible for the unifying the princely states into the Indian union. Ravishankar Maharaj (1884-1984), often referred to as the “silent servant,” was also a freedom fighter and Gandhian, as well as follower of Vinoba Bhave, another Gandhian famous for his cow protection agitation and *bhudan yagna* (literally, the sacrifice of land to the poor). Following Gandhi’s model, Ravishankar Maharaj (1884-1984) is said to have moved around freely and alone during communal violence in the past, visiting homes of all communities in order to curb violence. He inaugurated the state of Gujarat in 1960.

It is with Gandhi, who stands at the beginning of the spiritual genealogy, that the small mistake occurred. It consisted in the omission of a single syllable, the three

letters of the suffix “non,” as in non-vegetarian. But like with “non-vegetarian,” the result is absolutely devastating (see Figure 13 and Figure 14).

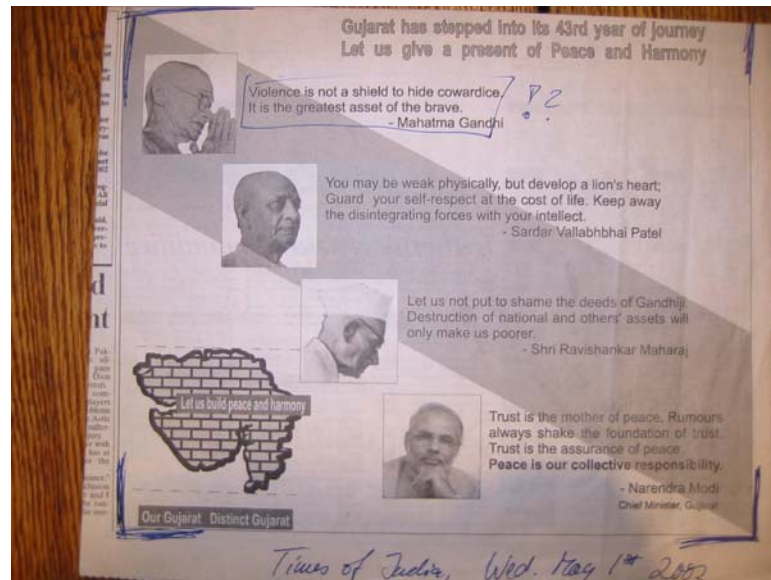


Figure 13. “Violence ...is the greatest asset of the brave,” Times of India, May 1, 2002 (Ahmedabad edition).

The following day the Times had corrected the “mistake:”

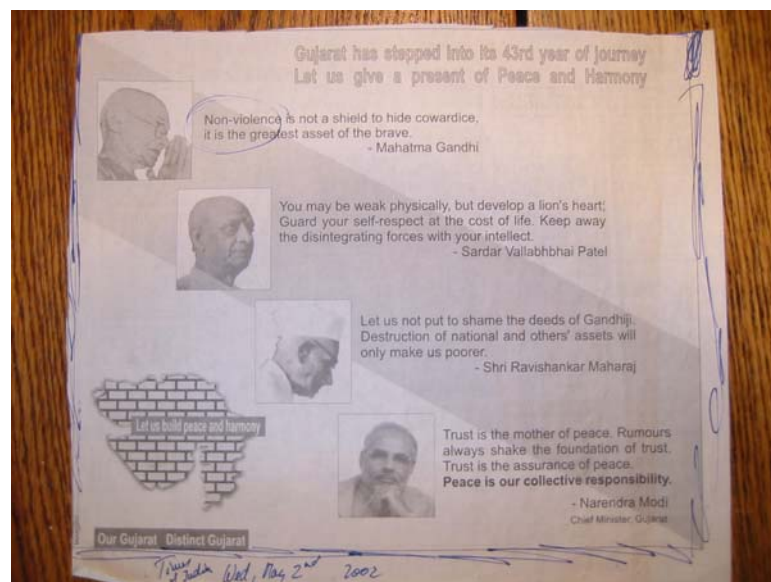


Figure 14. “Non-violence ...is the greatest asset of the brave,” Times of India, May 2, 2002 (Ahmedabad edition).

Was it a printing mistake? Was it perhaps a tasteless joke against Gandhiji? It certainly would not be the first one on the Mahatma. One can hear many a joke against him in the streets of Ahmedabad. Is it perhaps a sinister conspiracy brewed out by the *Sangh Parivar* in conjuncture with the Gujarat government? After all, some of its highest members are of RSS and VHP cadres. Would it not make sense to send out a secret message in the very newspaper that is usually accused of being “pseudo-secular” and having a “pro-minority bias”?

Or is it simply a co-incidence? According to Prakash (name changed), a reporter of the Times, whom I was able to query about the little embarrassing omission, it was a “bad coincidence.” It was a coincidence at a very bad moment, when the city had barely started recovering from being engulfed for weeks and months in a numbing violence. An apology was printed somewhere in the paper, without wanting to make too much of a wave out of it. I never found the apology, but I admit I could have looked harder. As we know from Evan-Evans Pritchard, an untimely co-incidence is usually no coincidence at all. Witchcraft is more likely.

I hope that this chapter will begin to throw light on the omission of “non,” a small omission with big consequences that was ignored or not even registered by many. The mistake becomes symptomatic once one confronts the enigmatic figure of Gandhi in Gujarat.

#### 5.1.2 Pratab and Violence in the city

In the evening of March 2, 2002, Pratab discussed with me the events surrounding the violence in the city. He had spent the entire day with the neighboring Patel husband and talked about what had happened during the last three days. He began with a description of the gruesome Godhra incident, which he summarized in only a couple of sentences. The sentences are significant because he not only mentioned the burnt bodies of passenger victims on the train, but also referred to all

the other elements we have encountered in the Sandesh newspaper reporting (chapter three). Pratab mentioned killing (*lokone maarva*), rape (*balaatkar karva*), and abduction (*strione potani paase le javi*, took women for themselves) of Hindu women by Muslims. He described the cutting of Hindu women's bodies (*talvaarthi khaapva ma ave chhe*), the sacrifice of life through shooting (*bandukthi dharaave chhe*),<sup>56</sup> and finally he envisioned a train full of Hindu corpses arriving in Ahmedabad railways station. There they were met by shocked family members.

Pratab's short summary is a deployment of the imaginary grid described in chapter three. It is completely indebted to the imaginary of the feature film *Gadar* and its invocation of Partition, although Pratab, significantly, never mentions the film or event explicitly. The imaginary grid works itself within him without leaving a trace of its origin: a movie, a newspaper article, a rumor. It is important for Pratab to note that a train with the victim's remains reached Ahmedabad because for him it was the viewing of these corpses, the power of that very sight, which explains why people got so angry (*to loko jue chhe to bahu guse thai chhe*). He also knows the sight from the movie *Gadar*, one of his favorite movies, which is on TV during the days and weeks following the Godhra incident. He knows many songs of the movie by heart. They are like the reservoir from which he draws his emotive references, but he does not seek such a chain of causality, and instead remains in the present, with present events.

The gruesomely charred corpses of the train of Godhra indeed arrived in Ahmedabad later on the day of February 27. The victims bodies were barely covered in white linen sheets and caused an emotional stir. But upon arrival they were not inside of a train, as Pratab was reporting, nor did the corpses arrive at the railway station. Instead, the corpses were transported to Ahmedabad Sola hospital in a huge motor cavalcade (that is, in cars) where they were laid out for viewing, photographed,

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<sup>56</sup>The verb *dharaavavu* literally means "make an offering, offer, to the deity" and "have, possess, hold, be endowed with" (GED).

and met by traumatized relatives as well as agitators of the VHP. The Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, had ordered the motor cavalcade against the explicit advice from Godhra district collector Jayanthi Ravi just a few hours after the incident. In the movie of *Gadar* trains from Lahore reach the Amritsar railway station where they are met by relatives who see bloody bodies hanging out of compartment windows and doors.

Pratab is seeing *Gadar* while he summarizes Godhra. The two sights complement each other and become one. The other criminal acts that he mentions--rape, shooting, cutting with swords--never took place in Godhra on that fateful morning, but they were reported and rumored, and finally, only after the Godhra incident, enacted during the pogrom. Pratab unreflexively mixes the representation of Godhra with the representation of *Gadar*, which is a memory of Partition, in a few single revelatory sentences.

According to Pratab the sight of these bodies made the Hindus angry. It is this becoming anger (*krodhe thaine*) that was able to unite all Hindus under the banner of unity (*ektaa*), the Bajrang Dal, the RSS, and the VHP.<sup>57</sup> Pratab's voice reveals fascination with this unity. It carries pathos. He lists all the districts he can think of in central Gujarat and some in Saurashtra. He says, "*all Gujarat maa, eni moTu svarup dhaaraN kari lidhu*" (in entire Gujarat, it assumed its own large form). The verb *dhaaraN karvu* means "to put on, to assume." In conjuncture with *rup* (form), as in *rup dhaaraN karvu*, the term means "to assume a form." The expression *avatar dhaaraN karvo* denotes "to assume an incarnation" and "to assume a birth (of a God)."

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<sup>57</sup>There is a fundamental inconsistency at work here. Pratab, like Bharat, knows perfectly well which organizations the *Sangh Parivar* consists of. At other moments he will actively insist that all these institution--Bajrang Dal (BD), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)--are really one and the same. Here, however, he treats them as distinct Hindu constituencies, which suddenly "come together." He is so caught up by the *Sangh's* deceptive language that he can't think of any division within Hindu society except this false one. Later, he sees division where there is none in order to claim unity in anger.

(TMGED). The term *svarup* translates not only into form, but “one’s own form or shape” as well as “natural state or condition, appearance” (GED). What Pratab is describing here is how anger (*krodh*, wrath, ire) took its own form, the form of “Hindu.” The sudden unity of Hindus is the very incarnation of anger after seeing the dead bodies of Godhra. He says, “*ane Hindu khub j krodhe praNa*” (and Hindus were breathed in great anger). Hindu unity is a unity of anger: a unity becoming its own natural form, which is an avatar of anger.

I ask him who arranged for the surgical attacks on Muslim establishments. Pratab insists there was no need to give orders or organize retaliatory violence. Wherever Muslims were seen in the last couple of days they were beaten (*maaro*), cut (*kaapo*), finished (*khatma karo*, destroyed, killed). I am insistent and ask him again who gave the orders to do so. He says, there was no order given, because “*hindutva ek jhaanun chhe*” (Hindutva is a fierceness, a passionate zeal). If my Hindu *bhai* (brothers) is killed, so one of the Muslims is killed in order to take revenge (*badlo leva maate*). In Pratab’s estimation the complicity of BJP and Narendra Modi’s is due only to their concern that the Congress Party might assume power in the next elections (*chuTNi*). Therefore the BJP must support the collective eruption of Hindu anger. For Pratab, the Gujarat government’s complicity is with the people, the Hindus, not with criminal elements of the RSS or the VHP. He says, “*Gujarat lokshaahi chhe, puraa India lokshaahi chhe*” (Gujarat is a democracy, entire India is a democracy). A democracy allows for elections, and the government simply tries to save itself from falling from grace (*potaanaa sarkaar bachaavava maate prayatna kare chhe*).

Much like Bharat, Pratab believes in a certain automaticity of revenge and counter-violence, whose origins underlie and far surpass the sphere of the political. The impulse for revenge comes from the people themselves, unified by the anger over the Godhra massacre. The incarnation of the people as anger is empowered by the fact

that in a democracy it is they who rule. But the origin of the people is not democracy. That origin is the anger of the “Hindu,” that essence which unites them, the *tatva* of *hindutva*. At worst democracy hinders the expression of legitimate anger, which means, it is corrupt. At best it allows for the people, the Hindus, to emerge as a unity and administer their legitimate punishment. Corrupt politicians brooding over corrupt laws just follow the people’s call knowing that in this moment of Hindu awakening (*jaagruti*), it is not in their interest to stem the tide.

This view of the political is chilling not only because it resounds perfectly with the *Sangh Parivar*’s claims, but also because it is self-consciously transcends the political, imputing its authority to the mystical realm of a unified people (an incarnation) as legitimate agent of anger. In this, it elides any political form, the state, law, those very checks and bounds that democratic form in theory consists of to tame the danger of the beast, an organism called “the people.”

When I ask him what will happen next Pratab tells me, “*haamNa Muslimo Hinduone dharaave chhe*” (Now Muslims are offering up Hindus). *Dharaavavu* is the causative form of *dharvu*, to satisfy, and literally means “to make to be satisfied.” Who is made to be satisfied here? The term is used to express an “offering to a God.” In other words, Muslims are offering the Hindus up to God, that is, Muslims sacrifice Hindus. The reason for this killing is the obligation that is sacrifice, the gnawing mouth of Agni (Fire) as described in chapter one. The term *dharaavavu* indicates the obligation and the “moral debt” that is owed to God.<sup>58</sup> It is important to note how and in what precise terms Pratab imagines the obligation of Muslims to kill Hindus,

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<sup>58</sup>Pratab’s use of the verb *dharvu* in this context deserves a longer explication. *Dharav* means “gratification,” *dharavavu* “satisfy, gratify” and “to satisfy (with food).” The non-causative *dharvu* denotes “to catch, hold arrest” but also “to present, produce before somebody.” In *bhog dharvo* it translates into “to offer a sacrifice” and “to place a victim before a God.” In *nauvegh dharvu* it denotes “to place a dish before an idol for acceptance.” Finally, the causative *dharaavavu* comes to mean, “to make an offering,” “to be under an obligation or a moral debt,” “to owe to” (cf. TMGED, GED).



because it reversely explains his notion of the obligation to kill Muslims, although he never says so explicitly.

He continues, that if he were now to go to Juhapura--the Muslim ghetto on the outskirts of Ahmedabad where close to the hostel he used to live in--they would see that he is not a Muslim. I ask him how they would see that. He says they would simply see it. He is uncomfortable with this question, and fidgets. They would know somehow and surely kill him, he says. I insist on the question and he thinks for a moment. They might ask him for a recitation of prayers, in a language he does not know. Or they would ask him to show how a real Muslim prays, which he also does not know. Many Muslims I am familiar with might fail these tests too, I respond, but I do not convince him. They will know, he insists. Somehow they will know.

Pratab continues that there has been a call to boycott all Muslim shops, goods, even the Bollywood movies, which feature Muslim actors are not to be seen. The city is pregnant with “*afvaao*” (rumors), a word, which Pratab uses alternately with “*infomotion*” (in English, information). People say that Muslims are now preparing for a response to the first day of violence against them. Pratab elaborates that Muslims will kill Hindus now one by one because their numbers are too few. They will not risk a frontal attack as they are in the minority. Pratab is terrified of this fact because he thinks the targeting of Hindus will consequently be anyone, anywhere, at any time.

In a similar way to Bharat, when narrating what’s going to happen next, Pratab inhabits the Muslim’s voice and thinks the generic Muslim’s thought: “*Hindu lokoe hamaare badu j kalu karyu, (...), hamaari dokano salgavi naakhi, (...) badu kalu thai gayu chhe (...). Everite (...) to ame lal karishu (...).*” (The Hindus have blackened everything, our shops were burned, all has become black. In the same way we are going to make them red). To “make Hindus red” (*lal karishu*), to redden them, means to stab them, the activity that Muslims are most often identified with: butchering,

stabbing, cutting. The blackening refers to the fact that Muslim shops were burned. Pratab does not mention the many Muslim bodies that were burnt. Acknowledging exceptions, he maintains that Hindus usually burn Muslim shops to harm them economically (*nukshaan karvaa maate*), whereas Muslims will now seek out and kill Hindus by stabbing them person after person (*ek pachhi ek khun karaava karsho*).

The logic seems to make perfect sense to Pratab precisely because it is so schematic and somewhat clichéd in its predictability. I find these imaginings clichéd for the very same reason Pratab finds them seductively convincing. The automaticity: black begets red and red begets black. Pratab says, “*khun karaave chee, dime dime*” (slowly step-by-step they will produce blood, make blood to be spilled). The preferred way of the Muslim is the silent knife, stabbing from the back (*paachaLthi*), in a dark alley when you are alone. It is a common stereotype in Ahmedabad, that Muslims stab, while Hindus burn notwithstanding the fact that the Godhra victims were burnt to death and not stabbed and pogrom victims were cut into pieces before being burned (see Figure 15.). Another friend, Prarag, a Marathi Brahmin, who was born and brought up in Ahmedabad, voices the same idea in the early days of the violence in a telephone conversation. He elaborates that Muslims are able to “withstand the sight of blood,” since they are butchers (sic!) and take non-veg (*non-veg le chhe*), and thus are stabbing their victims while Hindus burn them, since they are also burning their dead (compare chapter seven). He himself, too, was able to withstand a little, because he is a non-vegetarian. But, he emphasizes, he can’t go so far as a butcher.



Figure 15. Depiction of a stabbing incident. The victim is identifiable as Hindu through the red armband on his right wrist. Note how the stab victim lies on a doctor's operation table as if on a butcher's board, the horrific fascination expressed through the red circle around the knife stuck in his back. The red circle is to guide the viewer's eye to the exact spot where the knife penetrates the body of the victim.

Sandesh, April 23, 2002, front page.

### 5.1.3 The Gandhian who omits nothing

Pratab is twenty-three, married, and has two children. In 1999, he enrolled to learn Hindi at Gujarat University but often visited the library and professors of Gujarat Vidhyapit, a University founded in 1920 by Mohandas K. Gandhi. He is working on a degree on the life, works, and influence of the Mahatma, who he, like many Gujaratis, only refers to as “Gandhiji.” Seemingly disoriented and insecure in the big city, he was fortunate to have been assigned a student hostel room, although he did not particularly like the hostel in Vejalpur, a Hindu area adjacent to the “large” Muslim area of Juhapura at the South Western outskirts of Ahmedabad. Residents referred to the area as “Mini-Pakistan” already long before the 2002 pogrom.

Pratab never liked living in Vejalpur, and he later claimed that in the hostel he was made to cook “chicken” secretly by many of his caste brethren. He was proud not to suffer from the “malady of *allagi*,” like Bharat, but in any case the hostel warden

made it easier by prohibiting cooking of meat. He also stressed that many students were engaging in “eve-teasing” and “brawls,” activities of which he cannot brag.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas Bharat is strong, muscular, and thin, Pratab is even thinner, a true featherweight, although he also emphasizes always that he is strong, being a “*faarmaar*” (in English).

In the summer of 1999, shortly after we met, we took a walk together on CG road, a shopping area considered “posh” in West-Ahmedabad. It was his first time in this area. He took my hand while we promenaded in the area around Municipal market. The people and goods he saw disoriented him, and he declared that he was happy not being alone here. I experienced several such moments with Pratab: visiting the newly opened cinema complex “Citygold” on Ashram road, visiting the shopping and entertainment mall “Fun Republic” on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, and eating in a vegetarian Panjabi restaurant. He was unfamiliar with these high-end places. He had never eaten in a fancy restaurant with Air conditioners blowing gently, nor did he know Panjabi food. His insecurity expressed itself in an inability to choose from the menu. At first he insisted he simply wanted to eat “vegetables” (*shaakh*). The waiter replied, “There is nothing else.” It was not that Pratab could not stomach the food, as might have been the case with other such friends. Rather, he was so overwhelmed by new choices that he could not make a decision, which always means, to move on.

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<sup>59</sup>“Eve-teasing” is often brought together with non-vegetarian consumption as well as alcohol consumption. Compare, for example, local BJP MLA Bhavin Sheth who had non-vegetarian food stalls removed or converted to vegetarian ones at the Indian Institute of Management: “I did not want them to sell meat so openly. Many people would come there for the non-vegetarian fare after having liquor, and would then indulge in eve-teasing.” Navrangpura Police inspector R.B. Chauhan had not received any complaints about “eve-teasing” in the area but added nonetheless, “(...) one can assume that such things happen considering that it is near the university areas. It was best to have the non-vegetarian fare removed.” (“Ellisbridge MLA forces food stalls near IIM-A to go vegetarian,” *Times of India*, March 8, 2003, p. 3). In 1999 the Ahmedabad police introduced an “Anti-Romeo Squad” in order to curb the allegedly increasing incidences of “eve-teasing” in “sensitive areas.” O.S. Majumdar of Navrangpura police station tells the *Times* that plain clothes policemen and women are sent to places where youth meets on weekends like Municipal Market on CG Road or colleges campuses. When I visited several police stations to investigate the matter in 2003, I encountered a wall of silence and received little information about what the police officers in question actually do. (“Romeos roam fearlessly,” by Harit Mehta, *Times of India*, August 2, 2002).

Pratab repeatedly reminded me how the experience of city space differs across caste and class. There are divergent degrees of “foreignness” in places where one would not necessarily expect it. Even though we lived together in the city, I realized, this was a radically different experience for him than for me. His relationship to consumer culture, malls, restaurants, and posh areas never quite made sense to me. Pratab did acquire some familiarity with these things, but he never seemed to develop any desire for the experiences they offered, even after he came to know them. Whereas Bharat tried to expose himself to specific urban experiences and develop a competency in particular fields, Pratab was content with partial exposure alone. Pratab never had to labor to show restraint before stimulation, but at the same time he was perfectly capable of enjoying and indulging. His unlabored moderateness seemed to immunize him from the bombardment of desire that lies at the base of consumer society.

Many people thought Pratab to be highly unsophisticated, since he lacked the desire to substitute one “item” for another, and therefore did not develop any sense of fashion, style, or aesthetic refinement. He also did not seem like a typical Gandhian, belittling the shallowness of the present and visibly abstaining from consumption. How to renounce something you do not even know yet? However, I always thought of this as his great inner strength, as the absence of a great affliction. Instead of wanting, (or battling that wanting), he remained in the state of wonder, which he enjoyed even if it made him shy. In short, Pratab was never compelled to renounce anything.

#### 5.1.4 Boundaries that invite

Pratab comes from a village close to Bharat and is his caste brother. When he first arrives in the city he stays in the hostel, then several days with us, after which I let him stay with us for good, which he thankfully accepts. Pratab met Bharat the first time at a Bhutbhavani temple in Surendranagar district, when Bharat visited for

*darshan* of the Goddess. Both share the same *atak* (surname) and the same caste. At that time, ten years ago, there was no limit of *maryaadaa* (limit, boundary) between them, but it developed, because Pratab said, they lived together, sat together, woke up together, ate and drank together, and because Bharat is a “grand man,” a *profesar* (sic!). Since Pratab is still a student there needs to be *marayaadaa* between them. Bharat is his “*pujyabhai*,” as Pratab has it. The term *pujya* literally means a person worth worshipping, (from *puja*, worship). Boundary (*maryaadaa*), hierarchy (*Guru-chella*), and devotion (*pujya*) always appear where there is intimacy. It therefore takes away certain possibilities that closeness presents, while allowing for others. When Bharat hugs Pratab “accidentally” one night, Pratab places his mattress in a ninety-degree angle to it for the rest of our stay together.

After Pratab moved in, our household structure changed significantly. Bharat now had someone under him in the hierarchy, and my position with respect to him had also changed. He delegated all work to Pratab and expected me to do the same. Pratab’s comportment was to be markedly different from what I had encountered before. He called Bharat and me “*mota bhai*” and “*Guru*.” He almost instantly took over shopping, cooking, and even cleaning the apartment. Both Pratab and Bharat approached me for money to buy more utensils for the kitchen, now that there was someone to take care of these things systematically.

While Bharat could be moody and stubborn, Pratab was always sunny by nature, and eager to please. He began to perform small jobs for Bharat like standing in long lines at the post-office, transporting foodstuff, like a pot of ghee, back and forth from the village to the city, or copying important documents. He asked me to give him small jobs, too, despite the fact that he had his own classes to complete, as I always reminded him. Pratab never considered his service degrading or embarrassing; quite the opposite, he genuinely enjoyed the work, thinking of it as a *seva* (service for

a superior). It was for him one of the most important teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, to enjoy activity and work, and serve he did with great enthusiasm.

## 5.2 The Vegetarian housing society

The apartment building (called “society”) in which Bharat, Pratab and I lived through the Gujarat pogrom was owned and run by a wealthy Patel Bipinbhai, a strict follower of the Swaminarayan sect. The owner was explicit that no resident bring non-vegetarian food items into the house or in its immediate surroundings. It is common that in mixed residential areas explicit rules are set forth for residents of housing societies. In non-mixed areas populated only by specific groups and castes, no enforcement is needed. There, vegetarianism can be an unwritten rule, made explicit only at the moment of its potential or actual violation. Many restaurant owners in these areas have had this experience. When the popular Barista café--India’s answer to the US giant Starbucks--for example, opened on the posh CG Road, its manager had to promise a local Jain society (including many immediate neighbors) that it would never sell any non-vegetarian snacks, like chicken sandwiches.

CG Road is a prime location in West Ahmedabad and the prices in many of its shops and restaurants can be exorbitant. Those who can never afford to buy anything there, often call it “cheating road.” There are many posh restaurants in the area, some of which, like Tomatoes, Mirch Massala, and Surya, are non-vegetarian. Initially, I was puzzled that one restaurant faces troubles while another down the street did not. I suspected that pressure often emerged from local “societies” and neighborhoods, which is often the case. Notwithstanding these troubles for some owners, many of the non-vegetarian restaurants in the new city are owned only by a very small number of owners, who have influence in the right places to stave off agitation against them. As mentioned above, many non-vegetarian restaurants are chains with both vegetarian and non-vegetarian outlets to cater to both clienteles. Mirch Massala, for example, is

non-vegetarian only in Ahmedabad, but in Baroda it has a vegetarian and a non-vegetarian outlet. The popular Havmore restaurant, located in the West part of Ahmedabad, is strictly vegetarian in its Ahmedabad outlet but a paradise for non-vegetarians in Baroda.

The private consumption of non-vegetarian items in middle to lower-middle class vegetarian neighborhood can be equally cumbersome, as many residents will tell you. The practice of declaring restaurants and entire housing societies “pure vegetarian” has become an important strategy to legitimate selective screening of prospective residents in Ahmedabad. The practice clandestinely aids in keeping out members of unwanted groups, in particular middle-class Muslims.<sup>60</sup> Increasingly members of traditionally lower castes have hesitatingly been accepted in specific neighborhoods, but vegetarianism is a formidable new boundary that helps to associate an entire neighborhood with “cleanliness.” A Muslim resident is by definition a non-vegetarian, whereas a Hindu of whatever caste can always claim to practice the diverse form of vegetarianism (Swami Narayan, Vaishnava, Brahmin, Pandurang Shastri, Jain etc.) available. I have experienced repeatedly many members of middle classes who are ex-Untouchables claiming falsely to be vegetarians, mimicking their

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<sup>60</sup>In Mumbai, a city with a large Gujarati population, vegetarian housing societies preventing non-vegetarians from renting or buying flats are common, too, and according to press releases, they are constantly growing (“Flat out: realty strikes the non-veggies,” *Times of India*, June 27, 2002, front page).

In contrast to Ahmedabad, however, where there is a clandestine complicity to such covert segregation within the *Sangh Parivar*, attempts to emulate the city’s residential vegetarianism by area in Mumbai has led to unlikely conflicts with the city’s powerful Shiv Sena (Shivaji’s Army). The Shiv Sena is part of the *Sangh Parivar* and ideologically close to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but its constituency consists of meat and fish eating Maharashtrians (Koli fishing communities, for example). The Sena claims that many native Marathis are systematically discriminated against in their own city due to these “covertly vegetarian housing societies.” Maharashtrians are generally associated with much looser dietary habits than Gujaratis, as I indicate briefly in chapter seven elaborating on the problems of Payal’s in-law’s with their Gujarati neighbors. In 2003, under the leadership of Sena local leader Bala Kalshekar (*vibhag pramukh*, area commander), several Sainiks barged into some of these societies in Southern Mumbai, armed with packages of smelly *bombil* fish (Bombay Duck). Kalshekar threatened, “Already there is Hindu-Muslim segregation. Now we do not want Hindu-Jain isolation (...). If these vegetarian societies continue this segregation, the Shiv Sena will speak the language it is known for” (*Indian Express*, April 16, 2003, front page, “Sena’s new target: Veg societies”).



middle-class upper-caste colleagues, who also often calibrate their diet in view of wife, mother, and neighbor.

The restrictions on food usually spread from the house to the street despite the legal grey zone in which these injunctions are all operating. Areas with several vegetarian housing societies will often not allow any non-vegetarian establishments on the streets around it without serious threat of agitation and boycott. Many agitations are led by Jain institutions and even elected officials (MLA, member of legislative assembly) of the BJP.<sup>61</sup>

Consuming meat in vegetarian societies carries serious social risk. First of all, most of the time apartment doors are kept open for the cool breeze and to protect oneself from the curiosity of neighbors. Closed doors always invite suspicion. Often there is a see-through grill over the door that keeps unwanted visitors like beggars, monkeys, dogs, and neighboring children out, but that allows for smells and gazes to pass. Then there is the problem of the cooking and eating vessels (*vasaṇ*) themselves. To use vessels for a non-vegetarian dish is a serious breach of trust if one invites unexpected neighbors to eat from these polluted vessels. They feel betrayed if they later discover that you do indeed sometimes eat “non-veg,” possibly from these very same metal dishes.

Traditionally in rural Gujarat members of diverse castes dined together in marriage feasts, but they occupied separate spaces and ate from separate vessels. Today, if you separate the dishware to avoid contamination, you are revealing your own dietary tendencies, thus jeopardizing the carefully managed intimacy of eating.

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<sup>61</sup>Compare for example, *Sandesh*, February 15, 2002 (“*junaa Vaadajmaa matan shop saame ugr virodh*” (Fierce objection against mutton shop in old Vadaj); or *Times of India*, March 8, 2003, p. 3, “Ellisbridge MLA forces food stalls near IIM-A to go vegetarian.” Despite a perceptible tendency for restaurants to “convert” into vegetarian ones, there is a tendentious bias against the very bottom of the ladder of the food serving industry. Small Nepalese street vendors or Muslim meat stands, have a much harder time remaining in business as their lorries are often illegal in the first place, as no license was acquired, but more importantly there is no powerful ally in the city’s assembly who would ever support them.

Many high caste visitors will always politely decline to accept an invitation to a meal. For the same reason, many people will often decline water when offered. The usual explanation given is, “I do not take food from outside” or “I cannot take food outside.” Another possibility is to say that one is fasting, or to invoke a medical authority, as in “the doctor told me not to eat any of this type of food from outside.”

In addition, cooking vessels are often washed on the balcony faucet and the smell of water filled with the oil in which the food was fried permeates the air while the oily water spreads from one balcony to all other below it into a whole in the ground on the ground floor. Moreover, in many areas there exists no regular garbage disposal service. Crews of cows do some edible waste pick-up, and semi-domesticated pigs roam some city parts to eat what is inedible for goats or dogs, which also do their share of street cleaning. In the most orderly neighborhoods, garbage is taken from the door by a worker--usually identified as *bhangi* (untouchable sweeper)--who has to be paid privately and who owns the privileged first access to one's garbage. Housewives tend to treat them with disdain, even though they are totally dependent on them for this service. Whenever I took the time for a polite introduction to garbage workers and offered them a tea, in return they quite openly told me what people consume in which area.

In Bipinbhai's apartment building, however, even though a middle class house, bags with kitchen remains were simply thrown from the balcony on the railway tracks below, where they were inspected by dogs, cows, and then cleaned away by garbage workers (see Figure 16. and Figure 17.). This was not the only place in Ahmedabad where this was the common practice. To my initial amazement Pratab threw one bag out every day. City animals--especially dogs--chew open garbage bags making it easy for neighbors to detect remainders of meals with bones. Thus if one does not take care of forbidden food remains in a discreet manner, one can risk awakening the suspicious

vigilance of bored housewives in the neighborhood. It is best to abstain from any non-vegetarian behavior when living in these houses as there are too many ways in which the carefully managed intimacy can be breached. Many middle class families I knew did breach this intimacy, however, by frequenting non-veg restaurants or ordering take-out-food (which includes many disposable plastic dishes). They were careful about disposal, prudently giving the remainders to a young son who enjoys night rides on his motorbike.



Figure 16. The Intimacy of Garbage. Garbage workers sorting in front of vegetarian middle class housing societies at the railways tracks in Narangpura, Ahmedabad. In the picture below, note the high walls with barbed wires over which some middle class residents throw their daily waste.



Figure 17. The Intimacy of Garbage.

In the area where I lived with Pratab and Bharat there were several shops and establishments dedicated to Swaminarayan. Our apartment was situated at the Naranpura railway crossing near the Gujarati Thali restaurant Rasvatica, which initiated the kitchen work each day with a lengthy *puja* ceremony (worship ritual) for all the young men in uniform serving and cooking. The attractive sounds of the purification ceremony of the kitchen personnel and servers could be heard in the entire neighborhood block, proclaiming through sound the piety and the purity of the establishment. This Rasvatica restaurant, in whose entrance there dwelled a large beautiful statue of the elephant God Ganesh, Lord of obstacles and hindrances, cast a pale shadow over any temple that might have competed for its space, its colors, its sounds and smells. In fact, a small makeshift Ram temple along the railway tracks frequented by everyone but middle class neighbors, could not at all compete with this “pure vegetarian” restaurant. Food here was produced and consumed in an air of elaborate cleanliness and two permanent guards in black uniforms with golden buttons

oversaw a sea of white waiting chairs and made sure only distinguished eaters were allowed in.

At home, Pratab cooked daily a simple and hearty vegetarian meal, always with excessive *tel* (oil) and vegetables using onions and garlic liberally. My Jain language teacher at the time was often dismayed at the smell of my breath, not only because of the spices and vegetables she found disgusting (like garlic and onions) but also because she suspected me of secretly eating non-vegetarian “Muslim” food, which the smell of these spices and vegetables can signify. Ironically, at the time I was eating a purely vegetarian diet. When I once unguardedly complained to one of Bharat’s own academic superiors about the fact that he and Pratab were cooking with too much *tel* (oil) for my taste, I was bluntly told that this was because both were *tamas*, sharing the qualities (*guN*, attribute) of darkness, lethargy, and inertness associated with their low caste status. The professor recommended to arrange for a cook and offered to help me find one. Obviously, he thought, I was more *rajasi*, the *guN* of dynamism and energy typical for the former aristocratic class (*raja* for King, that is, *kshatriya*).<sup>62</sup> Annoyed about what I felt was a betrayal of my roommates by their own academic superior, to whom they always showed unfailing loyalty, I declined. This encounter brought home to me clearly the degree to which food implicitly structures the intimacy of hierarchy in Gujarat.

Our Patel neighbors, strict followers of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*, too, initially were skeptical of our dietary habits, given the unavoidable smell that passes from balcony to balcony, from doorstep to doorstep. But they finally acknowledged that not eating the forbidden “non-veg” but the rough manners of their two *rajput* neighbors (with that strange foreigner carrying a Muslim name) was the reason for the

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<sup>62</sup>The third of the *guN* is *satvik*, the cool and pure, which is conceptualized as purely vegetarian in Gujarat. *Rajasi* is often understood as implying vegetarianism also, but sometimes allows for non-vegetarian food. The person displaying *satvik* attributes--say an ideal Jain, ideal Brahmin, or renouncer, for example--eats only the minimum necessary for survival.

suspicious stench. The neighboring Patel mother-in-law entered our kitchen one day and discussed “healthy” cooking with Pratab, who was visibly thankful for the neighbor’s competent help.

With his good nature, Pratab befriended the neighbor’s mother in law within days by stressing both his family’s special relation to land and farming, although the Patel’s family head was an industrialist now. Then, he befriended the married wife herself by offering to drive for her with our only bicycle all the way over the bridges to the large and cheaper vegetable market at Mirzapur, in the old city. There vegetables are sold much cheaper than even by the Vagri lorries in the new city, who have skillfully calibrated their prices to their middle class customers. Bharat and Pratab called them thieves (*chor*) and cheaters (*chhetere chhe*).

Traditionally, a daughter-in-law is constantly chastised by her mother-in-law. It is said that she oversleeps, overspends, overcooks and under-works. But this young woman welcomed the pleasant tone and genuine help of the polite gentleman next door, even if he was but a rough little Rajput. At the same time, she kept a very careful distance from me and Bharat. Pratab’s congeniality, effeminate style, and constant helpfulness seemed to unhook the usual reservations and fears about interaction with the other gender. In the following weeks, Pratab, a married man, sat frequently with our neighbor’s wife and mother-in-law in the two adjacent living rooms of the neighboring apartment, cutting *gobi* (coli flower) or *binda* (“ladyfinger,” *okra*) together, and chatting away. When I discuss this with Bharat he points out that were he only to suggest such behavior, it would lead to a catastrophe as it would for me too. Pratab possessed something that we both lacked.

### 5.3 Sexuality

Considerably younger in age and demeanor than Bharat and me, Pratab nonetheless was the only one of us married--and, to boot, a proud father of two

children. Pratab's wife lived in his village, which he regularly visited, because, as he told me several times, she called him back "to have sex." Pratab did not agree with Gandhi's ideas on celibacy and told me that his wife would certainly run away were he to inhabit them. During my years in Ahmedabad, his wife never bothered to visit the city, but when I visited her in-laws she was curious about me. I wondered for a while if she might be afraid of her husband having a sexual affair with a man in the city, which Pratab clearly desired and often suggested to me.

Pratab certainly did not consider himself "gay," a word whose meaning he said he understood but at some level did not make much sense to him either. He could identify someone else as gay but never himself, like a Muslim of in his college. Nor did he ever reject his wife. Quite the contrary, he seemed to be genuinely fond of her and longed to reunite with her regularly. In fact, he was much more fond of his wife than many other married men that I knew in Ahmedabad, including men who were not interested in other men sexually. Pratab's openness to homosexual experience, while not considering himself "gay," stood in sharp contrast to Bharat's contractions.

Pratab often flaunted in a celebratory manner what he called his "hard farmer penis," claiming that he satisfied his wife at home very well while flirting with foreign men in the city. He visibly enjoyed the fact of his own arousal for its own sake. When alone with me, he was never ashamed to talk about sexual issues in detail and at great length. Such discussions were possible, he said, with only one single other friend from his home village.

In a way Pratab displayed a certain degree of sovereignty. His homosexual desires were protected by the secrecy of a society that did not really want to know about them. In Gujarat, I always got the impression that it was the pathological obsession with women's chastity--the way women are mere extensions of men's imaginations--that made possible this sort of affirmative male homosexual behavior.

The controlling gaze was so fully occupied with observing and imagining women, that in its shadows a non-discursive homosexuality could thrive, one that escaped being noticed despite being so blatantly obvious. Pratab was careful around Bharat, however, and whenever the “*mota bhai*” (Bharat) got the chance, he told me Pratab was just generally “*pagal*” (crazy). For Bharat, Pratab was simply the person that did not “fit” in the city because of his loose rural ways. I don’t know to what extent he was aware of Pratab’s sexual desires and escapades.

In Bharat’s presence my relationship to Pratab was always triangulated by the boundaries to his superior. If I would ask Pratab directly for his opinion, he would often simply excuse himself and say nothing. His reticence to say anything about Bharat was profound, and if I attempted to breach it, Pratab became embarrassed and was subsequently then too shy even to speak. His hierarchical relation to Bharat forbade him to speak to me about a series of subjects in front of this superior and in his gaze. Somewhat reminiscent but not isomorphic to the social situations in front of a Guru or a saint, the space of encounter between them was structured more tightly, demanding shyness and timidity. Bharat or I could bring up many topics and discuss them freely, but on some of these Pratab would simply remain mum. Most perplexing was the topic of sexuality, where it was Pratab who was the more experienced, being married, active, and a father of two, and the more capable and interested in talking about it.

In Bharat’s absence, however, Pratab was free to speak about all forbidden things. In contrast to Bharat, for Pratab *maryaadaa* (boundary, limit) came to mean, “tomorrow, I will tell you.” And indeed when Bharat was absent he would expel wildly. In that sense, for Pratab *maryaadaa* meant the opposite of a boundary. It meant “later” (*pachhi*) and “tomorrow” (*aavti kaale*) and thus transgression of the taboo circumscribed by the rules of *maryaadaa*. Bharat was aware that I discussed



things with Pratab in his absence, but he did not mind this because *marayaadaa* defined the boundary between them, their hierarchical relationship. It seemed as if Bharat accepted and even calculated the fact that Pratab would later expel in order to escape uncomfortable dialogue situations, for example, if I wanted to win over Pratab in a discussion against an argument that Bharat had made.

Less ambitious than Bharat, and less anal with meat, Pratab never discouraged me to eat it and he was proud that he lacked the malady of “*allagi*.” “You need it,” (*tamne joie chhe*) he tells me, about meat despite the teachings of Gandhi. Some people need it, he says, referring to caste affiliates, “I don’t.” Pratab treated the fact that others ate meat, or were prone to eat it, with great discretion. He applied the same discretion to his own sexual escapades, even though he excitedly liked talking about them, and he enjoyed telling me about other men who engage sexually with each other in the absence of their wives. There are natural urges, he thought, that call and have to be fulfilled in order to be *santosh* (satisfied, content, joy). And there are specific social situations in which one can talk about them, and others, where one absolutely cannot.

#### 5.4 Swimming with the RSS

What is the RSS? I ask Pratab, who has problems with the “s” and the “sh” in pronouncing the tongue breaker that is Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. He often says something akin to “*rastriya shwayamshevak shangh*,” which makes me laugh. Using the helpful abbreviation he explicates, “RSS, *e pure Hindu dharma ne maanvaavaaLo ek samu chhe, ek Hindu raashtra chhe*. (RSS is a collective of pure Hindus, believers of dharma, one Hindu nation).<sup>63</sup> After the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, Pratab

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<sup>63</sup>The term *samu* is a “whole, in sound condition,” *samudr* means ocean, sea, and *samudaay* is “collection, flock, mass” (GED).

continues, it was the RSS who were the first to come to the scene of rescue and help for the victims in Anjar, Bachau, and Bhuj.

According to Pratab, it was only because he was a member of the RSS that he was able to get a college room in a student hostel in Ahmedabad. He joined when he was twenty, two years ago, he confides in me as if a big secret. The RSS *shaakhaa* was in Jivrajpark, close to the *kshatriya* University hostel he stayed in. Unlike Bharat, he never went to an RSS *shaakhaa* (branch) in his home village. But the organization still helped him get a room in the hostel in the city. His 2000 Rupees college scholarship, too, was only received promptly through RSS intervention when he filled out the papers. There was a long line of applicants but he got it right away, he smiles. I want to know more about the RSS involvement in students' success to get fellowships. Pratab senses my suspicion. He explains it had nothing to do with corruption. If you come from the RSS, that is, if you are associated with the organization, you do not lie or take the scholarship money for something else. The organization makes you a little more respectable, he elaborates. Again, we can see how the RSS represents an enforcement of discipline from within.

In the *shaakhaa* he did *Bharatmata ni praarthnaa* (prayers for the Motherland), *yogaasan* (Yoga postures), *ramatgamat* (play, games, sport), *kasrat* (exercises) including Karate and stick fights (*laakDa*) for protection (*rakshaN*). After explaining the martial exercises Pratab suddenly says, “*aa karvu etle karvu j...aa thavu joie etle thavu j joie*” (if it is done then it is done...if it has to happen then it has to happen). At the time he was speaking, the two sentences appeared to me as non-sequiturs and I ignored them. Revisiting the interview on tape, however, I realized that they are almost a verbatim repetition of what K.K. Shastree infamously had told reporter Sheela Bhatt in an interview on March 12 about the post-Godhra violence. Commenting on the pogrom, Shastree had remarked “*Karvun j pade, karvun j pade*

(That had to be done, That had to be done). We don't like it, but we were terribly angry. Lust and anger are blind."<sup>64</sup> The interview with Pratab is recorded on April 1, 2002, more than two weeks after Shastree's chilling utterances. In other words, Pratab employs the very words of K. K. Shastree in the moment when he references martial exercises for *rakshaN* (protection) in the RSS. For someone like K.K Shastree all communal violence meted out by Hindus is per definition always about *rakshaN*, protection.

Pratab continues that they learned what to teach their children (*balaako*), reading many stories (*vaartaao vaanchvu joie*), reciting the Gita, Mahabharat, and the Ramayan, nothing he ever considered problematic. They also talked about Vivekananda, a *mahaan vyakti* (great personality), and he learned how the 19th century saint, considered as one of the founders of Neo-Hinduism, attended the Congress of Religions in Chicago (*chikago dharm parishad*) in 1893 and delivered a famed lecture on Hindu religion, a historical anecdote told often by many followers in Gujarat. This is a highly unusual piece of knowledge for someone who can barely distinguish America from Europe on a map. Pratab says Vivekananda praised the Gita in front of the entire world.

He liked his time in the organization, because, "If you are an RSS man you get help immediately when you need it" (*maddad tarata j aavshe, chokas aavshe*). "You are not alone" (*tame eklo j nathi*)." He liked it because the *shaakhaa* breathed an atmosphere of help and support, the "feeling of unity" (*ektaani bhavnaa*), and the lack of caste boundaries (*maryaadaa*, for example in questions of food intake). He mentions how RSS members have driven him back and forth to his home village, and how they support him when dealing with University bureaucracy. Today he does not attend meetings because he has to study, finish his thesis, and prepare for

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<sup>64</sup><http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/mar/12train.htm>, accessed March 12, 2005. Rediff.com, Tuesday March 12, 2002.

examinations. If you are not offering some time in return, however, he says, the RSS will not keep relations (*sambandh*).

When I pry further he reveals that attending a *shaakhaa* can imply taking great risk. One is always obligated to do something for them, he says, like agitations, or fighting on the streets. That is why he does not attend the *shaakhaa* any more. He is not a “*saacha RSS maaNas*” (not a real RSS man) he excuses himself. He does not want to fight, he admits, because he is afraid of it (*to mane dhar laage chhe, etla maate*).

I ask Pratab if there was any discussion about Islam as a religion. He reacts with hubris, “*Muslim to totally nathi. Muslim nu naam na le...*” (Muslims absolutely not. The name Muslim is never even uttered). The RSS was not a political organization at all, he implies, and continues that there was no direct talk about Jawaharlal Nehru and secularism, or Jyotindra Phule. When I ask him about that he repeats, “*RSS maa Jawaharlal nu naam nahi leva do, Phule... naa j leva, em*” (The name of Nehru is never uttered. Phule’s name is also not taken, that’s how it is). Ambedkar, Sadar Patel, and Mahatma Gandhi on the other hand, he claims, are mentioned frequently and discussed on equal terms.

Despite that fact that Muslims are never mentioned, he does remember, however, that he was explicitly taught that all Muslims should be beaten. Pratab claims that the RSS had only one message about Muslims (*eka j vaat kahe chhe*): Whenever you see one you should beat him. He inhabits the words of an RSS walla, “*(...) jo tamaaro road par jata hoy ane aapne dekhai chhe ke Muslim chhe, to ene maaro, bas (...)*” (If you walk on the road and you see it’s a Muslim, beat him, that’s it). And their shops should be burnt (*ene dokaano salgaavi do*). Pratab explains that for the RSS “*musalmaan loko hova j na joie*” (Muslims should not exist). The RSS expresses opposition to thinkers and issues by omission, avoiding mentioning their

names. The animosity is a silence that speaks louder than would any address. If Muslim are mentioned, then they are mentioned as that which should not be, which can't be named.

For Pratab there seems to be no contradiction that Islam as a religion is not discussed, Muslims are not even addressed by name, but should nonetheless be beaten and killed. Following the logic of a more sophisticated thinker like K. K Shastree (in chapter four) one might say: Islam is just one form of worship amongst many others. Indian Muslims, however, form a concrete community guilty of specific tendencies, behaviors, and sins. Indian Muslims need to be disciplined which cancels out that which makes them think they are different. Islam does not, as it already is a religion of discipline (a *dharma*). Muslims should call themselves Hindus (Muslim Hindus) while continuing to venerate their version of the formless, which they are allowed to call Allah or whatever else pleases them. A Hindu can choose the name of his or her God because Hinduism is a tolerant religion. Thus the conflict is not one of theology or belief, but one of discipline and punish.

Pratab has already had the experience of disciplining Muslims. He recounts how several years ago a girl of his *samaaj* (society, caste) that he knew had been caught having an affair with a Muslim boy close to his village. The relationship was stopped. Pratab proudly tells me, "We went and broke his arm." I cannot really imagine Pratab ever being that physically aggressive, but he tells me that a group of young men entered the Muslim boy's village, gathered locals around, and beat him up badly, resulting in a fracture on the boy's arm.

Once, I teased Pratab about being too ticklish. Bharat and I were lying together with him on the mattress. He was taking notes on Mahatma's thoughts in his notebook. He got angry at my ribbing and stabbed me somewhat unselfconsciously on my lower leg with a pen he had been holding. The wound was fairly deep. Bharat

was shocked and angry at him, and he began to calling him, as usual, *pagal* (crazy). I thought it had been my fault for teasing Pratab beyond his limit. He never felt guilty about the stabbing, however, and later I always joked about having been stabbed by the Mahatma's pen. Today, however, I might say it was more a hissing, like the hissing of a snake, than a stabbing. The hiss of the snake, in contradistinction to its poisonous bite, is a proverbial Gujarati idiom for a warning.

### 5.5 Pratab's version of Mahatma Gandhi

Pratab studies daily the writing of Mahatma Gandhi, copying and agglomerating sayings and paraphrasing the author's work even during the pogrom violence itself, which puzzled me. He is studying Hindi literature for an M.Phil. ("*maaster of filosofi*") as he always stresses. He likes to wear *khaadi* (handspun, hand woven cloth), and he admires my selection of *khaadi kurtas* of which I offer him several, which look a little too large for him. He once told me what he imagines people think if someone like him were to wear a *khaadi kurta* giving, say, a lecture. "People will understand me to be a Gandhian (*gandhivaadi*), that I am supporting Gandhi's thoughts" (*Gandhi na vichaaro paLaavavo*, nourishing, blossoming). To be a Gandhian means to be someone who speaks the truth (*satya bolvaaLo*), who practices *ahimsa* (*ahimsa nu aacharaN karvavaaLo*, someone who practices non-violence), who keeps celibacy (*brahmacharya*), and prayers to God.<sup>65</sup> But it was not factual anymore today he adds (*hakikat nathi*). Many politicians in India wear *khaadi* only as a veneer (*Bharat netao khaadi pahere chhe, maatr dekhaava maate*). They are wearing *khaadi* but their thoughts are different.

We talk about the Gujarat Vidhyapit, the university whose library Pratab attends many times. He tells me that for students like him, there is no independence

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<sup>65</sup>Usually in Gujarat when God is mentioned generically, one uses the term "Bhagwan," as Pratab does here. That all Gods are really one God is usually expressed with "*bhagwan to ek hai*" or "*eka j bhagwan*." All Gods are really one and the same.

(*svatantrataa nathi*) there. What is relevant about Gandhi there are only all these rules (*niyam*, norm, regulation, law, vow), that is why students have to wear *khaadi kurtas*, omit eggplant and potatoes from their diet in the canteen, abstain from smoking and movies, and have to learn to spin the *charka* wheel.

He sings for me “Itni sati hame dena data” (so much strength give us Lord) a famous Gandhian prayer song, which I heard several times performed during peace meetings organized by Gandhians in Ahmedabad. When he arrives at the end of the song he mimics electronic sound machines by making his voice fade slowly. The song is in Hindi and Pratab has learned it by heart. The meaning (*arth*) and message (*bodh*) of the prayer is that “*akho vishva bhaichaaraa rahe*” (brotherhood-ness should reside in the whole world), “*premthi rahe*” (one should live through love), the sweet smell of the flower of moderation should be given one to another (*phul ni maafak sugand bijaane aape*). Pratab says, “*ek agarbati maafak potanu jivan jive ke jem agarbati jaate bharine paN bijaanene sugand aape chhe.*” One should live in moderation like a burning *agarbati* (incense), which despite being spending itself in the process allows nonetheless others to enjoy its sweet smell. In that way one should live one’s entire life.

Pratab tells me with a language that seems not his own, that “*Gandhivaadmaa Gandhiji nu sampurN jivan avi jai chhe, sampurN tatva avi jai chhe, ane sampurN emni aadarsh shaili drashTi ane vichaar avi jai chhe.*” Gandhianism is about Gandhiji’s perfect life, the essence of completeness, and the pureness of his idealistic model (*aadarsh*, perfect type, ideal), which enters into thought and sight (*drashTi*, view). *SampurN* means complete, whole, entire, and perfect. Predictably, it also denotes “pureness” (CEGD), which can be reflected--channeled--through a looking glass, a mirror (*aadarsh*, model, ideal).

Pratab studies Hindi literature and his thesis is on the impact of Mahatma Gandhi's thinking on a collection of Hindi literature texts. The topic was the suggestion of his Hindi teacher. In Pratab's own words, he attempts to estimate, "*Gandhiji no prabhaav shu hatu*," what was Gandhi's strength (*prabhaav*, prowess, influence, majesty, effect). This includes his *vichaar* (thought), his *charitra* (biography), his *jivanshaili* (life-style) and how all these aspects of Gandhi are indicated in the work of specific Hindi writers (*kayrite lekhako darshaavi chhe*). He reads thirteen books of Gandhi, works like *Atmakatha* ("Autobiography"), *Hind Svaraj*, *Mangalprabhaat*, and he concentrates especially on those sections in which Gandhi gives vows (*jema Gandhijie vrato aapia chhe*). He also reads sections on *ahimsa* (non-violence), *govansh* (welfare of cows, literally the offspring of cows), *safaai* (cleanliness), *brahmacharya* (celibacy) in order to understand the Mahatma (*samaajvanu*).

I ask Pratab what Gandhi would do if confronted with the recent violence in Ahmedabad. He finds this a rather formidable question and lauds me loudly for it. Gandhi would fast (*upvaas karot*), he says, *khoraak na khavannu, paNi nahi pivannu* (he would neither eat nor drink). He would pray to God (*bhagwaan prarthana karvannu*). He would not go and harass the Muslims, he would make Hindus understand, and while fasting he would pray to God for support to deal with this misfortune (*musibat*). Gandhi's "weapon" to cast out the British from the country was only one single thing: fasting (*ene shaastra ek j hatu, te upvaas hatu*). He would fast and tell people not to engage in violence (*tame hinsa na karo*). If anyone slaps your cheeks, give him willingly (*premthi*, lovingly) the other one. And Gandhi was really practicing this, Pratab stresses. "*Bijane dukh na pahonchaaDo*" (Do not bring pain to someone else). If Muslims are attacking the Hindus, Pratab continues inhabiting Gandhian logic, Hindus should not retaliate ("*jo musalman loko Hindu lokone maare*



*chhe, to Hindu lokoe musalmanne na maarva joie*”), because any revenge is merely a challenge (*padak*) which will bring the entire country to war (*yudh tashe*).

Like many Gujaratis, Pratab understands Gandhi’s thoughts to be really based on Hindu spirituality (*adhyaatmikta*) and, ultimately, “Hindu dharma.” Members of educated high status groups often were more radical in their explanations to me, saying that those aspects of thought Westerners always find in Gandhi were really “Hindu,” or alternately “Jain,” concepts like *ahimsa* or vegetarianism. Others said that Hindu spirituality began in the Veda ages ago, by which is meant the part of the Veda that comprises the Upanishad. Gandhi himself was often dismissed, if carefully, as mere conduit for a spiritual depth that far surpassed him. Accordingly, the Mahatma is considered philosophically relatively unsophisticated.

In several settings, others responded to my references to Gandhi, and my research on “*ahimsa*,” with a certain degree of resentment. For example, one man contended that Gandhi knew very little Sanskrit and misrepresented the scriptures, another critiqued him for his involvement with Christians and Muslims, a third faulted Gandhi for misunderstanding *ahimsa*. These moments of transference brought to light a palpable resentment against the fact that the West has invested heavily in lending recognition to the figure of the Mahatma, but not in Hinduism or Jainism at large, which many consider to be philosophically deeper. For many people, what marked Gandhi as special were not his thoughts but his obstinacy in following them through even after failure. As one person told me, Gandhi was immensely practical and his was a practical philosophy of action. He was simply the opposite of a hypocrite, someone obstinate, that’s all. Gandhi was stubborn and acted out his lofty ideals without flexibility.

Pratab makes no distinction between a practical and a philosophical Gandhi. He too, understands Gandhi’s strength be partly his obdurate-ness, his insisting style,

the stubborn insistence on truth. It is the same strength that characterizes those Hindus that are called orthodox (*rudhichust*). He contends that Gujarati people, Hindus as well as Muslims, believe that Mahatma Gandhi was a very good person, repeating “very good” (*bahu sara*). He gave service (*seva*) to his people his entire life. Using a language that is usually applied for activists of the RSS, Pratab says, Gandhi’s “*swayamsevako*” (volunteers, he means Gandhian *satyagrahis*) did their service fully.

But, Pratab says, Gandhi made one mistake (*paarantu Gandhijithi ek bhul thai gai*). That mistake was to grant the Muslims a separate nation (*emne alag raashtra api*). He created a separate Pakistan. Pratab repeats the phrase that is sometimes used idiomatically by Gujaratis referencing Partition “*emne alag api*” (They were given something separate). That is why Nathuram Godse murdered Gandhi (*hatya karyu*). Pratab continues, that is why Hindus and Muslims are fighting each other today in every village: “*etla maate aaje gamDaomaa shaaheromaa aa hindu ane musalmaan je jagraa thai gaya chee aa kaaraN e chhe.*” Gandhi’s “*valaN*” (mental inclination) was such that he thought a separate nation of Pakistan was the solution. But it was not the solution because “*Indiamaa koi koi musalmaan rahi gaya*” (some Muslims stayed back to live in India). If all Muslims had gone to Pakistan, this question (*prashna*) would not arise. “*Emne alag api,*” they were given a separate entity, that was the problem. As many Gujaratis will tell you openly, Gandhi was a great man, but he had a soft corner for the Muslims, a sort of “soft spot,” like a flaw in his immaculate character.

When I try to argue that it was unfair to blame Gandhi for Partition, I realize that Pratab does not know that Mahatma Gandhi was not India’s first Prime Minister, but Jawaharlal Nehru. When I correct him, he says, “Yes right, the condition (*paristiti*) became bad because of that Jawaharlal Nehru.” Pratab remarks that in Gandhi’s times things were very politically charged and complicated (*motu politics*

*hatu*), and reversing the usual logic of the Edwina-Nehru affair, he claims that Nehru sold out to Pakistan because of an affair with some woman (he means Lord Mountbatten's wife). The usual version of this story is that Mountbatten was pro-Indian in the Kashmir question due to his wife's affair with Nehru. In any case, the relevance of this story to Pratab's understanding of Gandhi and Partition is to highlight the fear that sexual abstinence might lead to women having sexual affairs. Pratab thinks that Gandhi was confused about all the politics at the time of Independence, or, in fact, it was the people who were confused.

For Pratab at this moment Gandhi is the people, both are one and innocent. Nehru, however, was not. Pratab concludes, defending Gandhi, the reason why people would blame Mahatma Gandhi today is that only few read books and know "*what is Gandhiji?*" (in English as if to stress the objectivity of the answer to this question). As if apologizing for his disloyalty to the man he admires, he adds dryly, "*khaavaa maate rotli joie chhe, Gandhiji jharuri nathi...*" (in order to eat you need bread. Gandhi will not do...).

Why was fasting so important for Gandhi? I ask. Pratab responds that, Gandhiji understood fasting to be a remedy for deficiency (*Gandhiji upvaasne ghaT nu saadhan samajta*) and he adds, "*jem atyaare apNe loko banduk ne samajti hati, pistol, rakshaN maate, e loko upvaasne samajta hata.*"<sup>66</sup> The way we understand a rifle, a pistol, for protection, that way they [the Gandhians] understood fasting.<sup>67</sup> "*Ane upvaas dvara e andolan karta hata ane andolan dvara a jit manavyata hata.*" And by means of fasting, they made agitations and by way of agitation, they achieved victory (*jit*, won, conquered). He mentions the *dhandi yatra* (Gandhi's Dhandi march), and

<sup>66</sup>The term *ghaT* denotes "decrease, abatement, deficiency, shortage, loss." *Ghat aavavi, ghat javi*, or *ghat paaDvi* literally mean 'to fall short (of the proper weight etc.)' (GED).

<sup>67</sup>There is a slight inconsistency here. Pratab uses the past tense *samajti hati*, but speaks of the present, "now" using *atyaare*.

“*afrikan satyagraha karyu*” (the initial Satyagraha in South Africa). Gandhi fasted because he had to balance out weakness (*ghaT*, deficiency).

Pratab adds that the British knew very well that they could not harm Gandhi, as that would have seriously jeopardized their rule in India. Gandhi was too well shielded, protected (*Gandhijini e samay etli chhaya hati*). The term *chhaya* means shadow, shield. Gandhi was shielded by his people. He says, “*loko gharbaar mukhine aandolan chaale nikaltaa.*” People left their household aside in order to join the agitation (the movement). Pratab finishes, “*to Gandhiji best. Gandhiji jeva neta thaya paN nathi, chee paN nahi, ane tashe paN nahi.*” Gandhiji is the best. Such a leader has never appeared in the past, does not exist today, and will not emerge in the future either.

#### 5.5.1 Smashing idol Gandhi

After painting an ideal Gandhi, an “idol-Gandhi” decorated with a little *ahimsa* and *satya*, and a final brush of *sampurN* (perfection), Pratab quickly descends to blame the very same Gandhi for Partition. Partition, of course, is the source of all misery, the cause for all violence in the state and elsewhere in India, an issue around which most Indians can unite. It is when Mother was cut into pieces, when unity becomes division, pure becomes impure, and innocence is lost. It is when the shadow fell, it became dark, and the Mahatma was no longer shielded (*chhaya*).

Pratab’s ambivalent feelings towards the “Father of the Nation” are significant, and widespread in central Gujarat. The Mahatma is first erected as *sampurN* (perfect), and then, there is but this, says Pratab, one little *bhul* (mistake). The little mistake turns out to be not minor at all, but the source of all trouble, into which all resentment and hatred is poured. The mistake leads to the very dissection of the Mother. In countless speech situations, I have had similar experiences. In blaming Gandhi for

Partition Pratab is in no way unique. Gujarat's Gandhi stands fully in the shadow of Partition.

Note, that when I criticize Pratab for unfairly blaming Gandhi, he does not insist on his prior point, but he evades it conjuring up someone else, Jawaharlal Nehru. The figure of Nehru conjures up no reserve in Pratab. He does not mention any small "mistake" (*bhul*). Rather, the former Prime Minister is simply blamed wholeheartedly for Partition by alluding to his character: a sexual scandal, the so-called Nehru-Edwina affair. In other words, Nehru is destroyed without inhibition. Not so with Gandhi, however, who was whole and pure (*sampurn*). His' was but a *bhul* (mistake).

In Gujarati, you do not make a mistake actively, but you are associated with it passively. A mistake is a form of visitation: *mane bhul thai gayu*, which translates literally into "a mistake came over me" or "to me a mistake happened." In conventional English translations, the passive is usually simplified into the active "I made a mistake." When Pratab says that Gandhi made a mistake, he also says, that the mistake happened to him like an unfortunate accident, "*emne bhul thai gayu chhe*" (a mistake happened to him). Why not treat Gandhi like Nehru? Why not blame Gandhi wholeheartedly? Gandhi, the Father of the nation, is supposed to remain in this transcendent role, loved while hated, adored for perfection (*sampurn*) while blamed for the worst (the making imperfect of Mother India), the source of authority on the one hand, but the cause of all misery on the other.

It is important to understand Pratab's ambivalence towards Gandhi because it elucidates the attractiveness of Hindutva, the new incarnation of the "Hindu" as legitimate anger. Pratab visited an RSS *shakha* for several years and inhabits the *Sangh Parivar*'s discourse during the pogrom rather well as we have seen. Nonetheless he still holds on to something in Gandhi, something that he cherishes. He does not display the disgust of a hyperbolic vegetarianism (*allagi*), nor do Muslims

seem an obstacle to his ambitions, as is the case with Bharat. He voices suspicion towards all Muslim men, but then confesses having had sex with at least one, and exalting in his friendship to Muslim women. Pratab at times seems to identify with women, including Muslim women, against Muslim men. If being Gandhian means to speak the truth, voicing truthfully one's anger about the dissection of Mother, means becoming part of the essence of "Hindu." The *tatva* of Hindu (*hindu-tva*) is the release of this very anger. Even an effeminate Gandhian like Pratab can become angry, as I had to experience quite drastically.

The ambivalence of Pratab towards his "perfect" Gandhi expresses itself in more than one way. For example, on the one hand Gandhi showed his incredible strength by using austere practices to exert pressure on the British to leave India by following traditional techniques of accumulating ascetic power. On the other hand, Pratab stresses in sudden sobriety, that the British would not have dared to harm Gandhi anyway as the entire Indian people stood behind him as safeguard. In the alchemical metabolism, the renouncer abstains from sexual activity to preserve his semen, which rises up to accumulate inside his head forming a subtle matter and thus producing ascetic power (ascetic heat, *tapas*). Through the technique of semen retention, the traditional renouncer is independent from the social and can harvest his own magical power (O'Flaherty 1973, Kakar 1990a, Alter 1997).<sup>68</sup>

For Pratab, however, Gandhi's power was not independent. Rather, his *shakti* (a female power) was the power of the Indian people, the Indian nation, Mother India.

Although traditional forms of asceticism are clearly invoked in the context of

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<sup>68</sup>When Shiva remains celibate for thousand of years to attain power (*tapas*), he finally releases the dangerous heat when he ejaculates, burning the earth at Kama's intervention by sending pretty nymphs (O'Flaherty 1973); Lord Mahavir, the 24<sup>th</sup> Jain Tirthankara, recuperating from his magical battle with a rival, eats the meat of a cockerel not specifically killed for him, thus escaping the reciprocal shadow of violence while consuming flesh (Jha 2002:73, Alsdorf 1962, Schmidt 1968); as protection against murder and robbery, hired Charan bards who accompanied merchant caravans in Saurashtra started cutting into their own flesh (*traga*) threatening attackers with terrible supernatural consequences in case of a complete self-sacrifice (Spodek 1971:363, Enthoven 1922, Vol.1, 123pp and 271pp, Jhaveri 2003: 242-243, Forbes 1878, Vol. 2, 262-263, Westphal-Hellbush and Westphal 1976).

Gandhi's politico-religious activism, Pratab's Gandhi derives his power really from the union with the people (the nation). The Mahatma thus resembles more the traditional Saurashtrian King, whose prowess and potency to rule is ultimately dependent on the goodwill of the Mother Goddess exemplified in *shakta* worship. The King could never sustain this marvelous power on his own but needed to produce blood for her in order to rule, something Gandhi was very unwilling to do. Once Gandhi's decision stood in opposition to the people, by agreeing to break Mother through Partition he was no longer protected by all the people. A *bhul* came over him, like a shadow, a mistake.

Hence, what looks like the production of power at first, at second glance transforms into a form of castration and emasculation of the father. Pratab has heard about Gandhi's claim—rather typical for a certain generation of Gujaratis—that through the loss of semen eyesight and health are put in jeopardy. Pratab, however, does not believe in Gandhi's suggestion of self-chosen celibacy and abstention. Dry but confident, he tells me that the only real outcome if he turned celibate would be that his wife would run away. The wife would run away sapping the husband of his power the way the Indian people deserted their father, who chose to inhabit a woman in the moment when he should have been a man.

It is important to note that Gandhi never claimed the power that Pratab asserts he suddenly lost. Gandhi never held political office (Pratab thinks he was the first Prime Minister), nor did he ever insist being called a King, but cherished the qualities of motherhood especially at the end of his life, after the death of his wife Kasturba.<sup>69</sup> To insist on Gandhi's loss of power (*shakti*) is to insist that he ever held or wanted this power in the first place, like a King dependent on the power of the Goddess, or an ascetic renouncer dependent on bodily techniques to attain magical power (*tapas*).

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<sup>69</sup>Cf. Manubehn Gandhi (1949). For an interesting discussion on Gandhi's maternalism, see Erikson (1969:403-407).

Gandhi knew of both these traditional conceptions of magical potentiality, but I do not believe he ever confused his own activities with either of them. His was rather a stubborn attempt on an independent and sovereign morality.

For Pratab, in turn, Gandhi remained Mother, that is, he was one with the people, until the moment when there is “*bhaaglaa vakhate*,” until the time of breaking. At that moment he allowed Muslims their separate country Pakistan (*emne alag api*, literally, he gave them separate). When he allowed for Partition, he is made to be the father of the nation, albeit, a failed one, who stands accused of breaking Mother, the prior fullness. Gandhi becomes the father in order to stand accused. He stands accused because the unity of Mother--the people--has to remain intact. Pratab's blaming of the Mahatma thus stands in the service of allowing the imaginary unity of the people to remain unscathed.

I suppose that the historical Gandhi, finally defeated, “accepted” Partition only because he understood what Pratab does not want to see even today. In the end, it was the very people in whose name unity was invoked, and whose unity Gandhi himself had represented against the British, who betrayed that very idea. It was the people themselves that were responsible for the enactment of violence and the mutilation of their own newly found freedom. Perhaps the people had too many mothers at the time, too many ways to feel whole and restored to an imagined prior unity.

To understand fasting merely as a weapon, a *shastra* against the British, means that for Pratab pistol and rifle, instruments of violence, are transformations of the Gandhian fast, an act of non-violence. The link between renunciation and magical potentiality as described above has traditionally been a prevalent notion in Gujarat and elsewhere in India. Traditionally, all forms of penance produced magical power and Gandhi was simply one in a long line of personages that used self-mortification, self-sacrifice, and austerity for political purposes. Power seemed always to emerge in the



context of withholding consumption (asceticism), or it's inverse, the act of consuming, as in blood sacrifice.

Thus the deficiency that Gandhi cured with the remedy *upvaas* (fasting), a violence internalized, might as well be cured with the remedy "rifle," a violence externalized. And indeed, Gandhi was killed by such a rifle in the very moment where he represented no longer the people, but weakness and division. Both, the fast and the rifle, are merely transformations of each other in the same way *himsa and ahimsa*, sacrifice and suicide (self-sacrifice), are transformations of each other (see chapter one). They are both technologies to accumulate and channel power, a power whose source is really in the people. A single shot with a pistol by Nathuram Godse, a man of the people, and a man who in Gujarat is openly identified with the RSS, could do what the British never dared to do. The man, who claimed authority by and through self-sacrifice, was assassinated.

I was always struck by the fact that many Gujaratis today read Gandhi's murder not as the start into violence, but Partition as the reason for his death. Thus his assassination can retroactively be read as the opposite of murder, which is sacrifice, for the sake of unity. Gandhi's death was not self-sacrifice for the nation, but a sacrificial gift of the RSS to the nation. It was the reaction to the dissection of Mother (Partition). He was killed only after the unity of Mother had been violated. Gandhi was thus consumed by people, who were angry at his *bhul* (mistake). The people are Her, the one who always longs for blood. That is why whenever Nathuram Godse is mentioned, even if not lauded, he is rarely openly condemned, except by those who stand in unambiguous ideological opposition to the *Sangh Parivar*.

After his death, the very reason for Gandhi's weakness, which used to be his power, non-violence, becomes enshrined as surrogate of the father: the ideal (idol) of *ahimsa*, which is *sampurn* (perfect).

Gandhi's death itself inaugurates the reversal of renunciation back into a sacrificial logic by externalizing the violence that produces power back into the world. Gandhi was killed by a pistol, the opposite of fasting, and yet the same. Without much hesitation Pratab turns against the father back to the Mother (Bharat Mata, who are its people), whose loss of honor (her shame being violated, her castration) is blamed on the father.

The Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar has pointed out, that in India the son turns away from the father libidinally, but never through breaking with the father openly (1978). The lack of open conflict between father and son is symptomatic in a society, which on the one hand emphasizes patriliney while simultaneously making the father dependent, and the son responsible, for salvation. Gandhi is blamed but preserved, mourned but held responsible at the same time, like the many mum statues erected in his honor. The statues are erected so that one can turn away from them whenever one pleases. In a similar way Germans erect Holocaust memorials, which attract neo Nazis, who then deny the Holocaust. When Ahmedabadi residents drive in rush hour traffic they will risk an accident to greet a Goddess or a God in a little adjacent street temple at full speed. But no one will gesture to greet a dusty Gandhi statue. Nonetheless, Gandhi always remains *sampurn*.

Pratab's relation to Gandhi reveals a form of national idolatry, which allows distancing from Gandhi in the same moment as proximity through worship is claimed. It is in this sort of idolatry that the fundamentally ambivalent and unresolved emotions sustain themselves. Worship consists in the act of placing Gandhi on an elevated pedestal, in order to not have to confront the Gandhian demand. An idol, representing an ideal, allows for controlling one's relationship to that ideal. One can act out ambivalent emotions much better because pious adoration never demands replication of the signified ideal. In fact, the idol is in many ways exposed and dependent upon

the worshipper, who controls the mode of access to it. One can feed, bathe, clean, or neglect the deity, omitting or adding words to his sayings, like in the thumbnail version of *ahimsa*. In order to resist incorporation the sacred is controlled, kept at bay, confined into an object of veneration.

The enigmatic relationship to Gandhi in Gujarat does not consist in dismissing the Mahatma, his ideals or his fame, but rather in not ever dismissing him. The perfect idol Gandhi is caught in a prison of nationalist worship and ritual lip-service, lacking tenderness towards a figure, who is called the father of the nation. The relationship to the symbolic father is a broken one. To describe him as *sampurn* in one moment, and identify him with a “small” mistake in the next, a mistake that ends up swallowing all other aspects of Gandhi, reveals that the preceding deification (or idolization) really served only one purpose: the enactment of an aggression in a way similar to how the animal victim is identified with God in the moment of its slaughter. Pratab’s idolization of Gandhi has the sole function of punishing the father and turning towards the mother. For Pratab, Gandhi is idolized in order to allow Hindutva, the essence of Hindu, to emerge.

I suspect that this is the reason for the enigmatic fact, that of all possible organizations, it is the *Sangh Parivar*—representing the very ideology that killed the father Gandhi--which is put in the formidable position to rule over the meaning of the figure of Gandhi: to affirm Gandhi’s grandiosity as a true Hindu in one moment, but then to call for a Satyagraha for the erection of a Ram temple in Ayodhya in the next; to affirm the innocent docility of Hindus in one moment, and to call for arms dismissing Mahatma’s non-violent methods as outdated in the next. Whenever the Sangh dismissed Gandhi, it is able to voice a clandestine truth, which reverberates with people like Pratab or Bharat. It intuitively speaks with people who think in similar ways, but will carefully abstain to say so openly.

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I began this chapter with two newspaper clippings, which revealed a small mistake (a *bhul*), something that “happened” and came over the Times. Mahatma Gandhi, Sadar Vallabhai Patel, Ravishankar Maharaj, freedom fighters and men of undeniable and extraordinary courage and conviction in past times during communal violence, have become mere idols today. Their pictures do not address you, but they signify an idea(l) to which you establish a relationship by establishing a relationship to their image. In the Times of India, they are portrayed looking away as if not part of this world anymore.

Narendra Modi, however, who is undoubtedly associated with violence even by those who are in favor of him, is allowed to meet the eyes of the Gujarati people without shame. The thumbnail principle, of adding or subtracting the “non” to violence whenever one pleases, to associate Hindus with ahimsa, but to include nonetheless the *himsa* of *ahimsa* in one’s legitimate political repertoire, is an apt characterization of what has become of the ethical principle of non-violence. Violence and non-violence have become that over which one rules. One can add an “a” to *himsa*, or a “non” to violence, but it does not really matter. What does matter is if one has the position to play with both, as one wishes. One is merely the symmetrical reversal (mistake) of the other. That is the thumbnail principle of ahimsa.

In 2002, I discovered a curious bust a few hundred kilometers South of Gandhi’s birthplace Porbandar, just off the coast of Saurashtra (see Figure 18). It portrays Mahatma Gandhi, but the bust’s facial features are weirdly reminiscent to those of Sadar Vallabhai Patel. It is as though aspects of both faces are fused. Gujaratis hold a much more unambiguous emotional affirmation to “*Sadarji*” than to the “Father of the Nation” as if the idol Gandhi has been expropriated too much by

other people. Gandhi is too removed from Gujarat, perhaps because he belongs to the entire world now.

Patel, in turn, insisted on rebuilding the Somnath temple in 1951, which had been destroyed during Mahmud Al Ghazni's invasion in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. He was also responsible for joining the princely states into the Indian union at the time of Independence. If Sadar stands unambiguously for making whole, the Mahatma can easily be blamed for Partition. Narendra Modi, too, is called "*chhote Sadar*" (little Sadar) with reference to Patel. And indeed, Modi made Hindus unify in anger incarnate after the Godhra incident. Perhaps the artist made the Mahatma the way he would have wanted his Father to be, a little more like the Sadar.

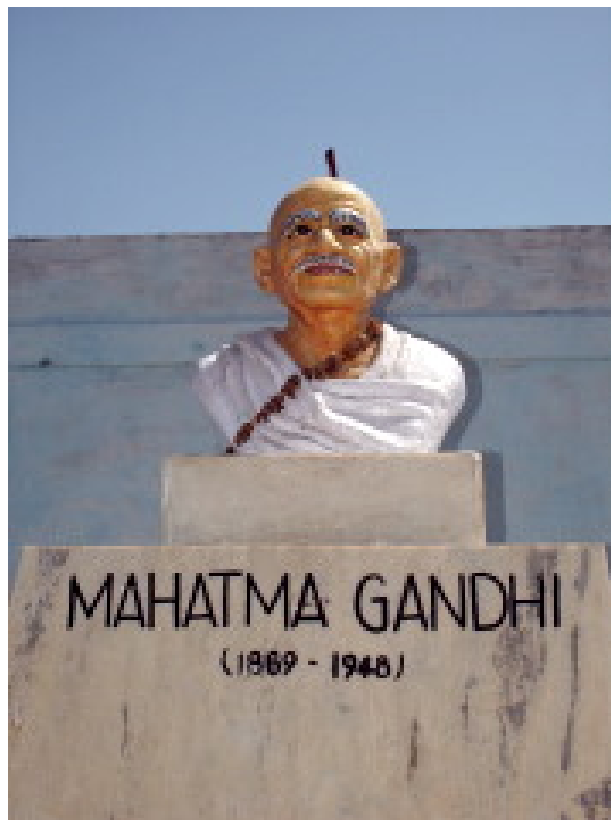


Figure 18. Gandhi or Patel?

## 5.6 Conclusion

I have seen Gujaratis who consider themselves staunch Hindus identify with Shi'as against Sunnis, Palestinians against Israelis, or more recently, Iraqis and against Americans. I have witnessed compassion and care for members of all Gujarati communities after the earthquake in 2001. Now, however, in the context of the pogroms in 2002, all realization of the other communities' pain and suffering does not lead to empathy but is immediately transformed into the imagination of a terrific revenge, which begets a fear that legitimizes further acts of violence. Gandhi's stubborn insistence on the truth of non-violence becomes without a wink, the very truth of violence, its necessity and reality. This is the thumbnail version of *ahimsa*.

In Pratab's initial responses to the pogrom violence on March 2, 2002, we can see how the ego's response to the awareness of how the other was harmed is not arrested in the question, "How will they deal with this plight?" or "Were innocent people killed?" Rather, thought continues as a non-sequitur: After the victimization of Muslims the question emerges, "What will they do to *us* next?" The empathetic relation to the suffering does not transform itself into compassion with the victim, perhaps a prerequisite for guilt. The identification remains empathetic, however, if we mean by empathy the identification with the *suffering* of a victim.

Instead of compassion and guilt, the identification metamorphoses into fear, a fear inaugurating the mimetic cycle. Fear, be it latent or expressed openly as in Pratab, becomes the fodder for the mimetic imagination: The more one sees horrific acts perpetrated against Muslims, the more these very acts are identified as having been committed upon us Hindus. That is why Bharat only retroactively (*nachträglich*) identifies what happened in Godhra as more than just an *akaasmat* (accident) perpetrated by Muslim *goondao*, but a gigantic *hatyakand* (massacre, slaughter of humans) including the rape of "young blood," who were taken for the pleasures of

Muslim men. That is why Pratab calls the killing of Hindus by Muslims an “offering up to God” (*dharaavavu*) in the very moment when the revenge killing of Muslims are expressed in sacrificial terms. It is important to note that he does so only after a media reportage laden with the sacrificial terminology had already emerged to describe and accompany collective acts of revenge against Muslims for several days. Both, Pratab and Bharat, are not trying to be cynical or twist the issue. They are completely sincere in this.

One’s fear becomes the symbolic material for imagining oneself as a victim in the very moment when one precisely is *not* a victim, but identifies with the side of the perpetrator. 59 Hindu pilgrims were killed in Godhra. On the following day hundreds of Muslims were killed in the city. The cognitive collectivization of violence proceeds by transforming the initial violence perpetrated on Hindu *karsevaks* (VHP activists) by Muslim ghetto dwellers (members of the Ghanchi community in Godhra) into an instantiation of a collective identification. It is “Muslims” who sacrifice “Hindus,” while the killing of Muslims is referred and recalled in sacrificial terms on the street and in newspapers. It is on the level of collective identity that all other narratives then fall into place: “missing women stolen for pleasure” signify the mass abduction of women during Partition, “train loads full of bodies” reference the brutal killings, the same way as cow-slaughter references the dissection of the Motherland.